Vladimir Nabokov

The Gift

Translated from the Russian by Michael Scammell with the collaboration of the author

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To Véra

Foreword

THE GREATER part of *The Gift* (in Russian, *Dar*) was written in 1935-1937, in Berlin; its last chapter was completed in 1937 on the French Riviera The leading émigré magazine *Sovremennye Zapiski,* conducted in Paris by a group of former members of the Social Revolutionary party, published the novel serially (*63-67,* 1937-8), omitting, however, Chapter Four, which was rejected for the same reasons that the biography it contains was rejected by Vasiliev in Chapter Three (p. 233): a pretty example of life finding itself obliged to imitate the very art it condemns Only in 1952, almost twenty years after it was begun, did there appear an entire edition of the novel brought out by the Samaritan organization, the Chekhov Publishing House, New York. It is fascinating to imagine the regime under which *Dar* may be read in Russia

I had been living in Berlin since 1922, thus synchronously with the young man of the book; but neither this fact, nor my sharing some of his interests, such as literature and lepidoptera, should make one say "aha" and identify the designer with the design. I am not, and never was, Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev; my father is not the explorer of Central Asia that I still may become some day; I never wooed Zina Mertz, and never worried about the poet Koncheyev or any other writer. In fact, it is rather

in Koncheyev, as well as in another incidental character, the novelist Vladimirov, that I distinguish odds and ends of myself as I was circa 1925.

In the days I worked on this book, I did not have the knack of recreating Berlin and its colony of expatriates as radically and ruthlessly as I have done in regard to certain environments in my later, English, fiction. Here and there history shows through artistry. Fyodor's attitude toward Germany reflects too typically perhaps the crude and irrational contempt that Russian émigrés had for the "natives" (in Berlin, Paris or Prague) My young man is moreover influenced by the rise of a nauseous dictatorship belonging to the period when the novel was written and not to the one it patchily reflects.

The tremendous outflow of intellectuals that formed such a prominent part of the general exodus from Soviet Russia in the first years of the Bolshevist Revolution seems today like the wanderings of some mythical tribe whose bird-signs and moon-signs I now retrieve from the desert dust We remained unknown to American intellectuals (who, bewitched by Communist propaganda, saw us merely as villainous generals, oil magnates, and gaunt ladies with lorgnettes) That world is now gone. Gone are Bunin, Aldanov, Remizov. Gone is Vladislav Khodasevich, the greatest Russian poet that the twentieth century has yet produced The old intellectuals are now dying out and have not found successors in the so-called Displaced Persons of the last two decades who have carried abroad the provincialism and Philistinism of their Soviet homeland.

The world of *The Gift* being at present as much of a phantasm as most of my other worlds, I can speak of this book with a certain degree of detachment. It is the last novel I wrote, or ever shall write, in Russian Its heroine is not Zina, but Russian Literature. The plot of Chapter One centers in Fyodor's poems. Chapter Two is a surge toward Pushkin in Fyodor's literary progress and contains his attempt to describe his father's zoological explorations.

Chapter Three shifts to Gogol, but its real hub is the love poem dedicated to Zina. Fyodor's book on Chernyshevski, a spiral within a sonnet, takes care of Chapter Four. The last chapter combines all the preceding themes and adumbrates the book Fyodor dreams of writing some day: *The Gift*. I wonder how far the imagination of the reader will follow the young lovers after they have been dismissed.

The participation of so many Russian muses within the orchestration of the novel makes its translation especially hard. My son Dmitri Nabokov completed the first chapter in English, but was prevented from continuing by the exigencies of his career. The four other chapters were translated by Michael Scammell. In the winter of 1961, at Montreux, I carefully revised the translation of all five chapters. I am responsible for the versions of the various poems and bits of poems scattered throughout the book. The epigraph is not a fabrication. The epilogic poem mimicks an Onegin stanza.

VLADIMIR NABOKOV

Montreux, March 28, 1962

The Gift

Chapter One

An oak is a tree. A rose is a flower. A deer is an animal. A sparrow is a bird. Russia is our fatherland. Death is inevitable.

P. SMIRNOVSKI,
A Textbook of Russian Grammar.

ONE CLOUDY but luminous day, towards four in the afternoon on April the first, 192– (a foreign critic once remarked that while many novels, most German ones for example, begin with a date, it is only Russian authors who, in keeping with the honesty peculiar to our literature, omit the final digit) a moving van, very long and very yellow, hitched to a tractor that was also yellow, with hypertrophied rear wheels and a shamelessly exposed anatomy, pulled up in front of Number Seven Tannenberg Street, in the west part of Berlin. The van's forehead bore a star-shaped ventilator. Running along its entire side was the name of the moving company in yard-high blue letters, each of which (including a square dot) was shaded laterally with black paint: a dishonest attempt to climb into the next dimension. On the sidewalk, before the house (in which I too shall dwell), stood two people who had obviously come out to meet their furniture (in *my* suitcase there are more manuscripts than shirts). The man, arrayed in a rough greenish-brown overcoat to which the wind imparted a ripple of life, was tall, beetle-browed and old, with the gray of his whiskers turning to russet in the area of the mouth, in which he insensitively held a cold, half-defoliated cigar butt. The woman, thickset and no longer

young, with bowlegs and a rather attractive pseudo-Chinese face, wore an astrakhan jacket; the wind, having rounded her, brought a whiff of rather good but slightly stale perfume. They both stood motionless and watched fixedly, with such attentiveness that one might think they were about to be short-changed, as three red-necked husky fellows in blue aprons wrestled with their furniture.

Some day, he thought, I must use such a scene to start a good, thick old-fashioned novel The fleeting thought was touched with a careless irony, an irony, however, that was quite unnecessary, because somebody within him, on his behalf, independently from him, had absorbed all this, recorded it, and filed it away. He himself had only moved in today, and now, for the first time, in the still unaccustomed state of local resident, he had run out to buy a few things. He knew the street and indeed the whole neighborhood: the boardinghouse from which he had moved was not far; until now, however, the street had revolved and glided this way and that, without any connection with him; today it had suddenly stopped; henceforth it would settle down as an extension of his new domicile.

Lined with lindens of medium size, with hanging droplets of rain distributed among their intricate black twigs according to the future arrangement of leaves (tomorrow each drop would contain a green pupil); complete with a smooth tarred surface some thirty feet across and variegated sidewalks (hand-built, and flattering to the feet), it rose at a barely perceptible angle, beginning with a post office and ending with a church, like an epistolary novel With a practiced eye he searched it for something that would become a daily sore spot, a daily torture for his senses, but there seemed to be nothing of that sort in the offing, and the diffuse light of the gray spring day was not only above suspicion but even promised to mollify any trifle that in more brilliant weather would not fail to crop up; this could be anything the color of a building, for instance, that immediately provoked an unpleasant taste in the mouth, a smack of oatmeal, or even halvah; an architectural detail

that effusively caught one's attention every time one passed by; the irritating sham of a caryatid, a hanger-on and not a support, which, even under a lighter burden, would crumble into plaster dust; or, on a tree trunk, fastened to it by a rusty thumbtack, a pointless but perpetually preserved corner of a notice in longhand (runny ink, blue runaway dog) that had outlived its usefulness but had not been fully torn off; or else an object in a shop window, or a smell that refused at the last moment to yield a memory it had seemed ready to shout, and remained instead on its street corner, a mystery withdrawn into itself. No, there was nothing like that (not yet in any case); it would be a good idea, he thought, some time at leisure to study the sequence of three or four kinds of shops and see if he were right in conjecturing that such a sequence followed its own law of composition, so that, having found the most frequent arrangement, one could deduce the average cycle for the streets of a given city, for example: tobacco shop, pharmacy, greengrocery. On Tannenberg Street these three were dissociated, occurring on different corners; perhaps, however, the rhythmic swarming had not yet established itself, and in the future, yielding to that counterpoint (as the proprietors either went broke or moved) they would gradually begin to gather according to the proper pattern: the greengrocery, with a glance over its shoulder, would cross the street, so as to be at first seven and then three doors away from the pharmacy—in somewhat the same way as the jumbled letters find their places in a film commercial; and at the end there is always one that does a kind of flip, and then hastily assumes its position (a comic character, the inevitable Jack the Sack among the new recruits); and thus they will wait until an adjacent place becomes vacant, whereupon they will both wink across at the tobacco shop, as if to say: "Quick, over here"; and before you know it they are all in a row, forming a typical line. God, how I hate all this—the things in the shop windows, the obtuse face of merchandise, and, above all, the ceremonial of transaction, the exchange of cloying compliments before and after! And

those lowered lashes of modest price . . . the nobility of the discount . . . the altruism of advertisements . . . all of this nasty imitation of good, which has a strange way of drawing in good people: Alexandra Yakovlevna, for example, confessed to me that when she goes shopping in familiar stores she is morally transplanted to a special world where she grows intoxicated from the wine of honesty, from the sweetness of mutual favors, and replies to the salesman's incarnadine smile with a smile of radiant rapture.

The type of Berlin store that he entered can adequately be determined by the presence in a corner of a small table holding a telephone, a directory, narcissi in a vase, and a large ashtray. This shop did not carry the Russian tipped cigarettes that he preferred, and he would have left empty-handed if it had not been for the tobacconist's speckled vest with mother-of-pearl buttons and his pumpkin-colored bald spot. Yes, all my life I shall be getting that extra little payment in kind to compensate my regular overpayment for merchandise foisted on me.

As he crossed toward the pharmacy at the corner he involuntarily turned his head because of a burst of light that had ricocheted from his temple, and saw, with that quick smile with which we greet a rainbow or a rose, a blindingly white parallelogram of sky being unloaded from the van—a dresser with mirror across which, as across a cinema screen, passed a flawlessly clear reflection of boughs, sliding and swaying not arboreally, but with a human vacillation, produced by the nature of those who were carrying this sky, these boughs, this gliding façade

He walked on toward the shop, but what he had just seen—whether because it had given him a kindred pleasure, or because it had taken him unawares and jolted him (as children in the hayloft fall into the resilient darkness) —released in him that pleasant something which for several days now had been at the murky bottom of his every thought, taking possession of him at the slightest provocation: my collection of poems has been published; and

when, as now, his mind tumbled like this, that is, when he recalled the fifty-odd poems that had just come out, he would skim in an instant the entire book, so that in the instantaneous mist of its madly accelerated music one could not make any readable sense of the flicking lines—the familiar words would rush past, swirling amid violent foam (whose seething was transformed into a mighty flowing motion if one fixed one's eyes on it, as we used to do long ago, looking down at it from a vibrating mill bridge until the bridge turned into a ship's stern. farewell!)—and this foam, and this flickering, and a separate verse that rushed past all alone, shouting in wild ecstasy from afar, probably calling him home, all of this, together with the creamy white of the cover, was merged in a blissful feeling of exceptional purity. . . . What am I doing! he thought, abruptly coming to his senses and realizing that the first thing he had done upon entering the next shop was to dump the change he had received at the tobacconist's onto the rubber islet in the middle of the glass counter, through which he glimpsed the submerged treasure of flasked perfumes, while the salesgirl's gaze, condescending toward his odd behavior, followed with curiosity this absentminded hand paying for a purchase that had not yet been named.

"A cake of almond soap, please," he said with dignity.

Thereupon he returned with the same springy step to the house. The sidewalk before it was now empty save for three blue chairs that looked as if they had been placed together by children Within the van a small brown piano lay supine, tied up so that it could not rise, and with its two little metal soles up in the air. On the stairs he met the movers pounding down, knees turned out, and, as he was ringing the doorbell of his new abode, he heard voices and hammering upstairs. His landlady let him in and said that she had left his keys in his room This large, predatory German woman had a funny name: Klara Stoboy—which to a Russian's ear sounded with sentimental firmness as "Klara is with thee (*s toboy*)."

And here is the oblong room, and the patiently waiting

suitcase . . . and at this point his carefree mood changed to revulsion: God forbid that anyone know the awful, degrading boredom, the recurrent refusal to accept the vile yoke of recurrent new quarters, the impossibility of living face-to-face with totally strange objects, the inevitability of insomnia on that daybed!

For some time he stood by the window. In the curds-and-whey sky opaline pits now and then formed where the blind sun circulated, and, in response, on the gray convex roof of the van, the slender shadows of linden branches hastened headlong toward substantiation, but dissolved without having materialized. The house directly across the way was half enclosed in scaffolding, while the sound part of its brick façade was overgrown with window-invading ivy. At the far end of the path that cut through its front yard he could make out the black sign of a coal cellar.

Taken by itself, all this was a view, just as the room was itself a separate entity; but now a middleman had appeared, and now that view became the view from this room and no other. The gift of sight which it now had received did not improve it. It would be hard, he mused, to transform the wallpaper (pale yellow, with bluish tulips) into a distant steppe. The desert of the desk would have to be tilled for a long time before it could sprout its first rhymes. And much cigarette ash would have to fall under the armchair and into its folds before it would become suitable for traveling.

The landlady came to call him to the telephone, and he, politely stooping his shoulders, followed her into the dining room. "In the first place, my dear sir," said Alexander Yakovlevich Chernyshevski, "why are they so reluctant at your old boardinghouse to divulge your new number? Left there with a bang, didn't you? In the second place, I want to congratulate you. . . . What, you have't heard yet? Honestly?" ("He hasn't heard anything about it yet," said Alexander Yakovlevich, turning the other side of his voice toward someone out of the range of the telephone.) "Well, in that case get a firm grip on yourself and listen to this—I'm going to read it to you: "The newly published collec-

tion of poems by the hitherto unknown author Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev strikes one as such a brilliant phenomenon, and the poetic talent of the author is so indisputable. . . .' You know what, I shan't go on, but you come over to our place tonight. Then you will get the whole article. No, Fyodor Konstantinovich, my good friend, I won't tell you anything now, neither who wrote this review, nor in what émigré Russian-language paper it appeared, but if you want my personal opinion, then don't be offended, but I think the fellow is treating you much too kindly. So you'll come? Excellent. We'll be expecting you."

As he hung up the receiver Fyodor nearly knocked the stand with flexible steel rod and attached pencil off the table; he tried to catch it, and it was then that he did knock it off; then he bumped his hip against the corner of the sideboard; then he dropped a cigarette that he was pulling out of the pack as he walked, and finally he miscalculated the swing of the door which flew open so resonantly that Frau Stoboy, just then passing along the corridor with a saucer of milk in her hand, uttered an icy "Oops!" He wanted to tell her that her pale yellow dress with bluish tulips was beautiful, that the parting in her frizzled hair and the quivering bags of her cheeks endowed her with a George-Sandesque regality; that her dining room was the height of perfection; but he limited himself to a beaming smile and nearly tripped over the tiger stripes which had not kept up with the cat as it jumped aside; after all, though, he had never doubted that it would be this way; that the world, in the person of a few hundred lovers of literature who had left St. Petersburg, Moscow and Kiev, would immediately appreciate his gift.

We have before us a thin volume entitled *Poems* (a plain swallow-tailed livery, which in recent years has become just as much *de rigueur* as the braiding of not long ago—from "Lunar Reveries" to symbolic Latin), containing about fifty twelve-line poems all devoted to a single theme: childhood. In fervently composing them, the author sought on the one hand to generalize reminiscences by selecting

elements typical of any successful childhood—hence their seeming obviousness; and on the other hand he has allowed only his genuine quiddity to penetrate into his poems—hence their seeming fastidiousness. At the same time he had to take great pains not to lose either his control of the game, or the viewpoint of the plaything The strategy of inspiration and the tactics of the mind, the flesh of poetry and the specter of translucent prose—these are the epithets that seem to us to characterize with sufficient accuracy the art of this young poet . . . And, having locked his door, he took out his book and threw himself on the couch —he had to reread it right away, before the excitement had time to cool, in order to check the superior quality of the poems and fore-fancy all the details of the high approbation given them by the intelligent, delightful, as yet unnamed reviewer. And now, as he sampled and tested them, he was doing the exact opposite of what he had done a short time ago, when he had skimmed over the book in one instantaneous thought. Now he read in three dimensions, as it were, carefully exploring each poem, lifted out like a cube from among the rest and bathed from all sides in that wonderful, fluffy country air after which one is always so tired in the evening. In other words, as he read, he again made use of all the materials already once gathered by his memory for the extraction of the present poems, and reconstructed everything, absolutely everything, as a returning traveler sees in an orphan's eyes not only the smile of its mother, whom he had known in his youth, but also an avenue ending in a burst of yellow light and that auburn leaf on the bench, and everything, everything. The collection opened with the poem "The Lost Ball," and one felt it was beginning to rain One of those evenings, heavy with clouds, that go so well with our northern firs, had condensed around the house. The avenue had returned from the park for the night, and its entrance was shrouded in dusk. Now the unfolding white shutters separate the room from the exterior darkness, whither the brighter portions of various household objects have already crossed to take up

tentative positions on different levels of the helplessly black garden. Bedtime is now at hand.

Games grow halfhearted and somewhat callous. She is old and she groans painfully as she kneels in three laborious stages.

My ball has rolled under Nurse's commode.
On the floor a candle
Tugs at the ends of the shadows
This way and that, but the ball is gone.
Then comes the crooked poker.
It potters and clatters in vain,
Knocks out a button
And then half a zwieback.
Suddenly out darts the ball
Into the quivering darkness,
Crosses the whole room and promptly goes under
The impregnable sofa

Why doesn't the epithet "quivering" quite satisfy me? Or does the puppeteer's colossal hand appear here for an instant among the creatures whose size the eye had come to accept (so that the spectator's first reaction at the end of the show is "How big I have grown!")? After all the room really *was* quivering, and that flickering, carrousel-like movement of shadows across the wall when the light is being carried away, or the shadowy camel on the ceiling with its monstrous humps heaving when Nurse wrestles with the bulky and unstable reed screen (whose expansion is inversely proportional to its degree of equilibrium)—these are all my very earliest memories, the ones closest to the original source. My probing thought often turns toward that original source, toward that reverse nothingness. Thus the nebulous state of the infant always seems to me to be a slow convalescence after a dreadful illness, and the receding from primal nonexistence becomes an approach to it when I strain my memory to the very limit so as to taste of that darkness and use its lessons to prepare myself for the darkness to come; but, as I turn my life upside down so that

birth becomes death, I fail to see at the verge of this dying-in-reverse anything that would correspond to the boundless terror that even a centenarian is said to experience when he faces the positive end; nothing, *except perhaps the aforementioned* shadows, which, rising from somewhere below when the candle takes off to leave the room (while the shadow of the left brass knob at the foot of my bed sweeps past like a black head swelling as it moves), assume their accustomed places above my nursery cot,

> And in their corners grow brazen
> Bearing only a casual likeness
> To their natural models.

In a whole set of poems, disarming by their sincerity. . . . no, that's nonsense— Why must one "disarm" the reader? *Is he* dangerous? In a whole set of *excellent* . . . or, to put it even more strongly, remarkable poems the author sings not only of these frightening shadows, but of brighter moments as well. Nonsense, I say! He does not write like that, my nameless, unknown eulogist, and it was only for his sake that I poetized the memory of two precious, and, I think, ancient toys. The first was an ample painted flowerpot containing an artificial plant from a sunny land, on which was perched a stuffed tropical songbird, so astonishingly lifelike that it seemed about to take wing, with black plumage and an amethyst breast; and, when the big key had been wheedled from the housekeeper Ivonna Ivanovna, inserted in the side of the pot and given several tight, vivifying turns, the little Malayan nightingale would open its beak . . . no, it would not even open its beak, for something odd had happened to the clockworn mechanism, to some spring or other, which, however, stored up its action for later. the bird would not sing then, but if one forgot about it and a week later happened to walk past its lofty wardrobe-top perch, then some mysterious tremor would suddenly make it emit its magical warbling—and how marvelously, how long it would trill,

puffing out its ruffled little breast; it would finish; then, on your way out, you would tread on another floorboard and in special response it would utter a final whistle, and grow silent halfway through the note. The other of the poetized toys, which was in another room, also on a high shelf, behaved in similar fashion, but with a zany suggestion of imitation—as the spirit of parody always goes along with genuine poetry. This was a clown in satin plus fours who was propping himself on two whitewashed parallel bars and who would be set in motion by an accidental jolt,

> To the sound of a miniature music
> With a comical pronunciation

tinkling somewhere beneath his little platform, as he lifted his legs in white stockings and with pompons on the shoes, higher and higher with barely perceptible jerks—and abruptly everything stopped and he froze in an angular attitude And perhaps it is the same with my poems? But the truthfulness of juxtapositions and deductions is sometimes better preserved on the near side of the verbal fence.

From the accumulating poetical pieces in the book we gradually obtain the image of an extremely receptive boy, living in extremely favorable surroundings. Our poet was born on July 12, 1900, in the Leshino manor, which for generations had been the country estate of the Godunov-Cherdyntsevs. Even before he reached school age the boy read through a considerable number of books from his father's library. In his interesting reminiscences so-and-so recalls how enthusiastically little Fedya and his sister Tanya, who was two years his elder, engaged in amateur theatricals, and how they would even write plays themselves for their performances. . . . That, my good man, may be true of other poets but in my case it is a lie. I have always been indifferent to the theater; although I remember that we did have a puppet theater with cardboard trees and a crenellated castle with celluloid windows the color of raspberry jelly through which painted flames like those on Vereshchagin's picture of the Moscow Fire flickered when

a candle was lighted inside—and it was this candle which, not without our participation, eventually caused the conflagration of the entire building Oh, but Tanya and I were fastidious when it came to toys! From indifferent givers on the outside we would often receive quite wretched things. Anything that came in a flat carton with an illustrated cover boded ill. To one such cover I tried to devote my stipulated twelve lines, but somehow the poem did not rise. A family, seated around a circular table illuminated by a lamp: the boy is dressed in an impossible sailor suit with a red tie, the girl wears laced boots, also red, both, with expressions of sensuous delectation, are stringing beads of various colors on straw-like rods, making little baskets, birdcages and boxes; and, with similar enthusiasm, their half-witted parents take part in the same pastime—the father with a prize growth on his pleased face, the mother with her imposing bosom, the dog is also looking at the table, and envious Grandma can be seen ensconced in the background. Those same children have now grown up and I often run across them in advertisements: he, with his glossy, sleekly tanned cheeks, is puffing voluptuously on a cigarette or holding in his brawny hand, with a carnivorous grin, a sandwich containing something red ("eat more meat!"); she is smiling at a stocking she herself is wearing, or, with depraved delight, pouring artificial cream on canned fruit; and in time they will become sprightly, rosy, gormandizing oldsters—and still have ahead of them the infernal black beauty of oaken caskets in a palm-decked display window. . . . Thus a world of handsome demons develops side by side with us, in a cheerfully sinister relationship to our everyday existence; but in the handsome demon there is always some secret flaw, a shameful wart on the behind of this semblance of perfection: the glamorous glutton of the advertisement, gorging himself on gelatin, can never know the quiet joys of the gourmet, and his fashions (lingering on the billboard while we move onward) are always just a little behind those of real life Some day I shall come back to a discussion of this nemesis, which

finds a soft spot for its blow exactly where the whole sense and power of the creature it strikes seem to lie.

In general Tanya and I preferred sweaty games to quiet ones—running, hide-and-seek, battles. How remarkably the word "battle" (*srazhenie*) suggests the sound of springy compression when one rammed into the toy gun its projectile—a six-inch stick of colored wood, deprived of its rubber suction cup in order to increase the impact with which it struck the gilt tin of a breastplate (worn by a cross between a cuirassier and a redskin), making in it a respectable little dent.

> . . . You reload to the bottom the barrel,
> With a creaking of springs
> Resiliently pressing it down on the floor,
> And you see, half concealed by the door,
> That your double has stopped in the mirror,
> Rainbow feathers in head band
> Standing on end.

The author had occasion to hide (we are now in the Godunov-Cherdyntsevs' mansion on the English Quay of the Neva, where it stands even today) among draperies, under tables, behind the upright cushions of silk divans, in a wardrobe, where moth crystals crunched under one's feet (and whence one could observe unseen a slowly passing manservant, who would seem strangely different, alive, ethereal, smelling of apples and tea) and also

> Under a helical staircase,
> Or behind a lonely buffet
> Forgotten in a bare room

on whose dusty shelves vegetated such objects as: a necklace made of wolf's teeth; a small bare-bellied idol of almatolite; another, of porcelain, its black tongue stuck out in national greeting; a chess set with camels instead of bishops; an articulated wooden dragon; a Soyot snuffbox of clouded glass; ditto, of agate; a shaman's tambourine and the rabbit's foot going with it; a boot of wapiti leather with

an innersole made from the bark of the blue honeysuckle; an ensiform Tibetan coin; a cup of Kara jade, a silver brooch with turquoises, a lama's lampad, and a lot of similar junk which—like dust, like the postcard from a German spa with its mother-of-pearl "Gruss"—my father, who could not stomach ethnography, somehow happened to bring back from his fabulous travels. The real treasures—his butterfly collection, his museum—were preserved in three locked halls; but the present book of poems contains nothing about that: a special intuition forewarned the young author that some day he would want to speak in quite another way, not in miniature verse with charms and chimes but in very, very different, manly words about his famous father.

Again something has gone wrong, and one hears the flippantly flat little voice of the reviewer (perhaps even of the female sex) With warm affection the poet recalls the rooms of the family house where it (his childhood) was spent. He has been able to imbue with much lyricism the poetic descriptions of objects among which it was spent When you listen closely . . . We all, attentively and piously . The strains of the past . . . Thus, for instance, he depicts lampshades, lithographs on the walls, his schoolroom desk, the weekly visit of the floor-polishers (who leave behind an odor compounded of "frost, sweat, and mastic"), and the checking of the clocks:

On Thursdays there comes from the clock shop
A courteous old man who proceeds
To wind with a leisurely hand
All the clocks in the house.
He steals at his own watch a glance
And sets the clock on the wall
He stands on a chair, and he waits
For the clock to discharge its noon
Completely Then, having done well
His agreeable task,
He soundlessly puts back the chair,
And with a slight whir the clock ticks.

Giving an occasional tongue clack with its pendulum and making a strange pause, as if to gather its strength, before striking. Its ticking, like an unrolled tape divided by stripes into inches, served as an endless measure of my insomnias It was just as hard for me to fall asleep as to sneeze without having tickled with something the inside of a nostril, or to commit suicide by resorting to means at the body's disposal (swallowing my tongue, or something like that). At the beginning of the agonizing night I could still play for time by subsisting on conversations with Tanya, whose bed stood in the next room; despite rules, we would open the door slightly, and then, when we heard our governess going to her own room, which was adjacent to Tanya's, one of us would gently shut it: a lightning barefoot sprint and then a dive into bed. While the door was ajar we would exchange conundrums from room to room, every now and then lapsing into silence (I can still hear the tone of this twin silence in the dark), she to guess mine, I to think of another. Mine were always on the fantastic and silly side, while Tanya adhered to classical models:

mon premier est un métal précieux,
mon second est un habitant des cieux,
et mon tout est un fruit délicieux.

Sometimes she would fall asleep while I waited patiently, thinking that she was struggling with my riddle, and neither my pleading nor my imprecations would succeed in reviving her. After this I would voyage for more than an hour through the dark of my bed, arching the bedclothes over myself, so as to form a cavern, at whose distant exit I glimpsed a bit of oblique bluish light that had nothing in common with my bedroom, with the Neva night, with the rich, darkly translucent flounces of the window curtains. The cave I was exploring held in its folds and fissures such a dreamy reality, brimmed with such oppressive mystery, that a throbbing, as of a muted drum, would begin in my chest and in my ears; in there, in its depth, where my father had discovered a new species of bat, I could make

out the high cheekbones of an idol hewn from the rock; and, when I finally dozed off, a dozen strong hands would overturn me and, with an awful silk-ripping sound, someone would unstitch me from top to bottom, after which an agile hand would slip inside me and powerfully squeeze my heart. Or else I would be turned into a horse, screaming in a Mongolian voice: shamans yanked at its hocks with lassos, so that its legs would break with a crunch and collapse at right angles to the body—my body—which lay with its chest pressed against the yellow ground, and, as a sign of extreme agony, the horse's tail would rise fountain-like; it dropped back, and I awoke.

Time to get up The stove-heater pats
The glistening facings
Of the stove to determine
If the fire has grown to the top.
It has And to its hot hum
The morning responds with the silence of snow,
Pink-shaded azure,
And immaculate whiteness.

It is strange how a memory will grow into a wax figure, how the cherub grows suspiciously prettier as its frame darkens with age—strange, strange are the mishaps of memory I emigrated seven years ago; this foreign land has by now lost its aura of abroadness just as my own ceased to be a geographic habit. The Year Seven The wandering ghost of an empire immediately adopted this system of reckoning, akin to the one formerly introduced by the ardent French citizen in honor of newborn liberty. But the years roll on, and honor is no consolation; recollections either melt away, or else acquire a deathly gloss, so that instead of marvelous apparitions we are left with a fan of picture postcards. Nothing can help here, no poetry, no stereoscope—that gadget which in ominous bug-eyed silence used to endow a cupola with such convexity and surround mug-carrying Karlsbad promenaders with such a diabolical semblance of space that I was tormented by

nightmares after this optical diversion far more than after tales of Mongolian tortures. The particular stereo camera I remember adorned the waiting room of our dentist, an American named Lawson, whose French mistress Mme. Ducamp, a gray-haired harpy, seated at her desk among vials of blood-red Lawson mouthwash, pursed her lips and nervously scratched her scalp as she tried to find an ap-pointment for Tanya and me, and finally, with an effort and a screech, managed to push her spitting pen between la Princesse Toumanoff, with a blot at the end, and Monsieur Danzas, with a blot at the beginning. Here is the description of a drive to this dentist, who had warned the day before that "this one will have to come out." . . .

What will it be like to be sitting
Half an hour from now in this brougham?
With what eyes shall I look at these snowflakes
And black branches of trees?
How shall I follow again with my gaze
That conical curbstone
In its cottonwool cap? How recall
On my way back my way there?
(While with revulsion and tenderness
Constantly feeling the handkerchief
Wherein carefully folded is something
Like an ivory watch charm.)

That "cottonwool cap" is not only ambiguous but does not even begin to express what I meant—namely, the snow piled caplike on granite cones joined by a chain somewhere in the vicinity of the statue of Peter the Great. Somewhere! Alas, it is already difficult for me to gather all the parts of the past; already I am beginning to forget relationships and connections between objects that still thrive in my memory, objects I thereby condemn to extinction. If so, what insult-ing mockery to affirm smugly that

Thus a former impression keeps living
Within harmony's ice.

What, then, compels me to compose poems about my childhood if in spite of everything, my words go wide of the mark, or else slay both the pard and the hart with the exploding bullet of an "accurate" epithet? But let us not despair. The man says I am a real poet—which means that the hunt was not in vain

Here is another twelve-line poem about boyhood torments It deals with the ordeals of winter in town when, for example, ribbed stockings chafe behind the knees, or when the shopgirl pulls an impossibly flat kid glove onto your hand, laid on the counter as if on an executioner's block. There is more: the hook's double pinch (the first time it slipped off) while you stand with outspread arms to have your fur collar fastened; but in compensation for this, what an amusing change in acoustics, how rounded all sounds become when the collar is raised; and since we have touched upon ears, how unforgettable the silky, taut, buzzing music while the strings of your cap's earflaps are being tied (raise your chin)

Merrily, to coin a phrase, youngsters romp on a frosty day. At the entrance to the public park we have the balloon vendor; above his head, three times his size, an enormous rustling cluster. Look, children, how they billow and rub against each other, all full of God's sunshine, in red, blue and green shades. A beautiful sight! Please, Uncle. I want the biggest (the white one with the rooster painted on it and the red embryo floating inside, which, when its mother is destroyed, will escape up to the ceiling and a day later will come down, all wrinkled and quite tame). Now the happy children have bought their ruble balloon and the kindly hawker has pulled it out of the jostling bunch. Just a minute, my lad, don't grab, let me cut the string. After which he puts on his mittens again, checks the string around his waist, from which his scissors dangle, and pushing off with his heel, slowly begins to rise in an upright position, higher and higher into the blue sky look, his cluster is no larger now than a bunch of grapes, while beneath him lies hazy, gilded, berimed St. Petersburg, a

little restored here and there, alas, according to the best pictures of our national painters.

But joking aside, it really was all very beautiful, very quiet. The trees in the park mimed their own ghosts and the whole effect revealed immense talent. Tanya and I would make fun of the sleds of our coevals, especially if they were covered with fringed, carpetlike stuff and had a high seat (equipped even with a back) and reins that the rider held as he braked with his felt boots. This kind never made it all the way to the final snowdrift, but instead went off course almost immediately and began to spin helplessly while continuing to descend, carrying a pallid, intent child who was obliged, when the sled's momentum was spent, to work with his feet in order to reach the end of the icy run. Tanya and I had weighty belly sleds from Sangalli's: such a sled consisted simply of a rectangular velvet cushion on iron runners curved at each end. You did not have to pull it on the way to the slide—it glided with so little effort and so impatiently along the snow, sanded in vain, that it bumped against your heels. Here we are at the hill.

One climbed up a sparkle-splashed platform. . . . (Water carried up in buckets to pour on the slide had *splashed* over the wooden steps so that they were coated with *sparkling* ice, but the well-meaning alliteration had not been able to get all this in.)

> One climbed a sparkle-splashed platform,
> One dashingly fell belly first
> On the sled, and it rattled
> Down the blueness: and then
> When the scene underwent a grim change,
> And there somberly burned in the nursery
> Scarlet fever on Christmas,
> Or, on Easter, diphtheria,
> One rocketed down the bright, brittle,
> Exaggerated ice hill
> In a kind of half tropical,
> Half-Tavricheski park

where, by the power of delirium, General Nikolai Mihailovich Przhevalski was transferred, together with his stone camel, from the Alexandrovski park near us, and where he immediately turned into a statue of my father who was at that moment somewhere between Kokand and Ashkhabad, for example, or else on a slope of the Tsinin Range What illnesses Tanya and I went through! Now together, now by turns; and how I would suffer when I heard, between the slam of a distant door and the restrained quiet sound of another one, her footfall and laughter bursting through, sounding celestially indifferent to me, unaware of me, infinitely distant from my fat compress with its tawny oilcloth filling, my aching legs, my bodily heaviness and constriction, but if it was she who was sick, how earthly and real, how like a crisp soccer ball I felt when I saw her lying in bed with an air of remoteness about her as if she had turned toward the other world, with only the limp lining of her being toward me! Let me describe the last stand before the capitulation when, not yet having stepped out of the normal course of the day, concealing from your own self the fever, the ache in your joints, and wrapping yourself up Mexican fashion, you disguise the claims of fever's chill as the demands of the game, and when, a half hour later, you have surrendered and ended up in bed, your body no longer believes that just a short time ago it was playing, crawling on all fours along the floor of the hall, along the parquet, along the quarpet. Let us describe Mother's questioning smile of alarm when she has just put the thermometer in my armpit (a task she would not entrust either to the valet or to the governess) "Well, you've got yourself into a nice fix, haven't you?" says she, still trying to joke about it Then a minute later "I knew it yesterday, I knew you had a fever, you can't fool me" And after another minute "How much do you think you have?" And finally. "I think we can take it out now" She brings the incandescent glass tube close to the light and, drawing together her lovely sealskin eyebrows—which Tanya has inherited—she looks for a long time . . . and then with-

out saying anything she unhurriedly shakes the thermometer and slips it back into its case, looking at me as if not quite recognizing me, while my father rides his horse at a walk across a vernal plain all blue with irises; let us describe also the delirious state in which one feels huge numbers grow, inflating one's brain, accompanied by someone's incessant patter quite unrelated to you, as if in the dark garden adjoining the madhouse of the book-of-sums several of its characters, half out (or more precisely, fifty-seven one-hundred-and-elevenths out) of their terrible world of increasing interests, appeared in their stock parts of applewoman, four ditchdiggers and a Certain Person who has bequeathed his children a caravan of fractions, and chatted, to the accompaniment of the nocturnal sough of trees, about something extremely domestic and silly, but therefore all the more awful, all the more doomed to turn into those very numbers, into that mathematical universe expanding endlessly (an expansion which for me sheds an odd light on the macrocosmic theories of today's physicists). Let us describe finally the recovery, when there is no longer any point in shaking the mercury down, and the thermometer is carelessly left lying on the bedtable, where an assembly of books that has come to congratulate you and a few playthings (idle onlookers) are crowding out the half-empty bottles of turbid potions.

A writing case with my note paper
Is what I most vividly see:
The leaves are adorned with a horseshoe
And my monogram I had become
Quite an expert in twisted initials,
Intaglio seals, dry flattened flowers
(Which a little girl sent me from Nice)
And sealing wax, red and bronze-gleaming.

None of the poems in the book alludes to a certain extraordinary thing that happened to me as I was recovering from a particularly severe case of pneumonia. When everyone had moved into the drawing room (to use a

mother is already paying ten rubles for a perfectly ordinary green Faber pencil, which is then lovingly wrapped in brown paper by two clerks and handed to Vasiliy, who is already carrying it behind my mother to the sleigh, which now speeds along anonymous streets back to our house, now advancing to meet it; but here the crystal-line course of my clairvoyance was interrupted by Yvonna Ivanovna's arrival with broth and toast. I needed her help to sit up in bed. She gave the pillow a swat and placed the bed tray (with its midget feet and a perpetually sticky area near its southwestern corner) across the animated blanket before me. Suddenly the door opened and Mother came in, smiling and holding a long, brown paper package like a halberd. From it emerged a Faber pencil a yard long and of corresponding thickness: a display giant that had hung horizontally in the window as an advertisement and had once happened to arouse my whimsical greed. I must still have been in that blissful state when any oddity descends among us like a demi-god to mingle unrecognized with the Sunday crowd, since at that moment I felt no amazement at what had happened to me, but only remarked to myself in passing how I had been mistaken in regard to the object's size; but later, when I had grown stronger and plugged up certain chinks with bread, I would ponder with superstitious pangs about my clairvoyant spell (the only one I ever experienced), of which I was so ashamed that I concealed it even from Tanya; and I nearly burst into tears from embarrassment when we happened to meet, on my very first trip outdoors, a distant relative of Mother's, one Gaydukov, who said to her: "Your brother and I saw you the other day near Treumann's "

Meanwhile the air in the poems has grown warmer and we are preparing to return to the country, where we might move as early as April in the years before I began school (I began it only at the age of twelve).

The snow, gone from the slopes, lurks in ravines,
And the Petersburg spring
Is full of excitement and of anemones

And of the first butterflies.
But I don't need last year's Vanessas,
Those bleached hibernators,
Or those utterly battered Brimstones,
Through transparent woods flying.
I shall not fail, though, to detect
The four lovely gauze wings
Of the softest Geometrid moth in the world
Spread flat on a mottled pale birchtrunk.

This poem is the author's own favorite, but he did not include it in the collection because, once again, the theme is connected with that of his father and economy of art advised him not to touch that theme before the right time came. Instead he reproduced such spring impressions as the first sensation immediately upon walking out of the station: the softness of the ground, its kindred proximity to your foot, and around your head the totally unrestrained flow of air. Vying with each other, furiously lavishing invitations, standing up on their boxes, flourishing their free hand and mingling their uproar with exaggerated "whoas," the droshky drivers called to the early arrivals. A little way off an open motorcar, crimson both inside and out, awaited us: the idea of speed had already given a slant to the steering wheel (sea-cliff trees will understand what I mean), while its general appearance still retained—out of a false sense of propriety, I suppose—a servile link with the shape of a victoria; but if this was indeed an attempt at mimicry then it was totally destroyed by the roar of the motor with the muffler bypass opened, a roar so ferocious that long before we came in sight a peasant on a hay wagon coming the other way would jump off and try to hood his horse with a sack—after which he and his cart would often end up in the ditch or even in the field; where, a minute later, having already forgotten us and our dust, the rural stillness would collect again, cool and tender, with only the tiniest aperture left for the song of a skylark.

Perhaps one day, on foreign-made soles with heels long since worn down, feeling myself a ghost despite the idiotic

substantiality of the insulators, I shall again come out of that station and without visible companions walk along the footpath that accompanies the highway the ten or so versts to Leshino. One after another the telegraph poles will hum at my approach. A crow will settle on a boulder—settle and straighten a wing that has folded wrong. The day will probably be on the grayish side. Changes in the appearance of the surrounding landscape that I cannot imagine, as well as some of the oldest landmarks that somehow I have forgotten, will greet me alternately, even mingling from time to time. I think that as I walk I shall utter something like a moan, in tune with the poles. When I reach the sites where I grew up and see this and that—or else, because of fires, rebuilding, lumbering operations or the negligence of nature, see neither this nor that (but still make out something infinitely and unwaveringly faithful to me, if only because my eyes are, in the long run, made of the same stuff as the grayness, the clarity, the dampness of those sites), then, after all the excitement, I shall experience a certain satiation of suffering—perhaps on the mountain pass to a kind of happiness which it is too early for me to know (I know only that when I reach it, it will be with pen in hand). But there is one thing, I shall definitely not find there awaiting me—the thing which, indeed, made the whole business of exile worth cultivating: my childhood and the fruits of my childhood. Its fruits—here they are, today, already ripe; while my childhood itself has disappeared into a distance even more remote than that of our Russian North.

The author has found effective words to describe sensations experienced upon making the transition to the countryside. How much fun it is, says he, when

No longer one needs to put on
A cap, or change one's light shoes,
In order to run out again in the spring
On the brick-colored sand of the garden.

At the age of ten a new diversion was added. We were still in the city when the marvel rolled in For quite a time I led it around by its ram horns from room to room; with what bashful grace it moved along the parquet floor until it impaled itself on a thumbtack! Compared to my old, rattling and pitiful little tricycle. whose wheels were so thin that it would get stuck even in the sand of the garden terrace, the newcomer possessed a heavenly lightness of movement. This is well expressed by the poet in the following lines:

Oh that first bicycle!
Its splendor, its height,
"Dux" or *"Pobéda"* inscribed on its frame,
The quietness of its tight tire!
The wavers and weavers in the green avenue
Where sun macules glide up one's wrists
And where molehills loom black
And threaten one's downfall!
But next day one skims over them,
And support as in dreamland is lacking,
And trusting in this dream simplicity,
The bicycle does not collapse.

And the day after that there inevitably come thoughts of "free-wheeling"—a word which to this day I cannot hear without seeing a strip of smooth, sloping, sticky ground glide past, accompanied by a barely audible murmur of rubber and an ever-so-gentle lisp of steel. Bicycling and riding, boating and bathing, tennis and croquet; picnicking under the pines; the lure of the water mill and the hayloft—this is a general list of the themes that move our author. What about his poems from the point of view of form? These, of course, are miniatures, but they are executed with a phenomenally delicate mastery that brings out clearly every hair, not because everything is delineated with an excessively selective touch, but because the presence of the smallest feature is involuntarily conveyed to the reader by the integrity and reliability of a talent that assures the

author's observance of all the articles of the artistic covenant. One can argue whether it is worth while to revive album-type poetry, but one certainly cannot deny that within the limits he has set himself Godunov-Cherdyntsev has solved his prosodic problem correctly. Each of his poems iridesces with harlequin colors. Whoever is fond of the picturesque genre will appreciate this little volume. To the blind man at the church door it would have nothing to say. What vision the author has! Awaking early in the morning he knew what kind of a day it would be by looking at a chink in the shutter, which

Showed a blue that was bluer than blue
And was hardly inferior in blueness
To my present remembrance of it.

And in the evening he gazes with the same screwed-up eyes at the field, one side of which is already in shadow, while the other, farther one

Is illumed, from its central big boulder
To the edge of the forest beyond it
And is bright as by day.

It would seem to us that perhaps it was really not literature but painting for which he was destined from childhood, and while we know nothing of the author's present condition, we can nevertheless clearly picture a straw-hatted boy, sitting very uncomfortably on a garden bench with his watercolor paraphernalia and painting the world bequeathed him by his forebears:

Cells of white porcelain
Contain blue, green, red honey.
First, out of pencil lines,
On rough paper a garden is formed.
The birches, the balcony of the outbuilding,
All is spotted with sunlight I soak
And twirl tight the tip of my paintbrush
In rich orange yellow;

And, meantime, within the full goblet,
In the radiance of its cut glass,
What colors have blazed,
What rapture has bloomed!

This, then, is Godunov-Cherdyntsev's little volume. In conclusion let us add . . . What else? What else? Imagination, do prompt me! Can it be true that all the enchantingly throbbing things of which I have dreamt and still dream through my poems have not been lost in them and have been noticed by the reader whose review I shall see before the day is over? Can it really be that he has understood everything in them, understood that besides the good old "picturesqueness" they also contain special poetic meaning (when one's mind, after going around itself in the subliminal labyrinth, returns with newfound music that alone makes poems what they should be)? As he read them, did he read them not only as words but as chinks between words, as one should do when reading poetry? Or did he simply skim over them, like them and praise them, calling attention to the significance of their sequence, a feature fashionable in our time, when time is in fashion: if a collection opens with a poem about "A Lost Ball," it must close with "The Found Ball."

Only pictures and ikons remained
In their places that year
When childhood was ended, and something
Happened to the old house in a hurry
All the rooms with each other
Were exchanging their furniture,
Cupboards and screens, and a host
Of unwieldy big things:
And it was then that from under a sofa,
Alive, and incredibly dear,
It was revealed in a corner.

The book's exterior appearance is pleasing.

Having squeezed the final drop of sweetness from it, Fyodor stretched and got up from his couch. He felt very hungry. The hands of his watch had lately begun to misbehave, now and then starting to move counterclockwise, so that he could not depend on them; to judge by the light, however, the day, about to leave on a journey, had sat down with its family for a pensive pause. When Fyodor went outside he felt immersed in a damp chill (it's a good thing I put that on): while he had been musing over his poems, rain had lacquered the street from end to end. The van had gone and in the spot where its tractor had recently stood, there remained next to the sidewalk a rainbow of oil, with the purple predominant and plumelike twist. Asphalt's parakeet. And what had been the name of the moving company? Max Lux. Mac's luck.

Did I take the keys? Fyodor suddenly thought, stopping and thrusting his hand into his raincoat pocket. There he located a clinking handful, weighty and reassuring. When, three years ago, still during his existence here as a student, his mother had moved to Paris to live with Tanya, she had written that she just could not get used to being liberated from the perpetual fetters that chain a Berliner to the door lock. He imagined her joy upon reading the article about him and for an instant he felt maternal pride toward himself; not only that but a maternal tear burned the edge of his eyelids.

But what do I care whether or not I receive attention during my lifetime, if I am not certain that the world will remember me until its last darkest winter, marveling like Ronsard's old woman? And yet . . . I am still a long way from thirty, and here today I am already noticed Noticed! Thank you, my land, for this remotest . . . A lyric possibility flitted past, singing quite close to his ear. Thank you, my land, for your most precious . . . I no longer need the sound "oticed": the rhyme has kindled life, but the rhyme itself is abandoned And maddest gift my thanks are due . . . I suppose "meshes" waits in the wings. Did not have

time to make out my third line in that burst of light. Pity. All gone now, missed my cue.

He bought some piroshki (one with meat, another with cabbage, a third with tapioca, a fourth with rice, a fifth . . . could not afford a fifth) in a Russian foodshop, which was a kind of wax museum of the old country's cuisine, and quickly finished them off on a damp bench in a small public garden

The rain began coming down faster: someone had suddenly tilted the sky. He had to take cover in the circular shelter at the streetcar stop. There on the bench two Germans with briefcases were discussing a deal and endowing it with such dialectic details that the nature of the merchandise was lost, as when you are looking through an article in Brockhaus' Encyclopedia and lose its subject, indicated in the text only by its initial letter. Shaking her bobbed hair a girl entered the shelter with a small, wheezing, toadlike bulldog. Now this is odd: "remotest" and "noticed" are together again and certain combination is ringing persistently. I will not be tempted.

The shower ended. With perfect simplicity—no dramatics, no tricks—all the streetlamps came on. He decided he could already set off for the Chernyshevskis' so as to be there towards nine, Rhine, fine, cline. As happens with drunks, something preserved him when he crossed streets in this state Illuminated by a streetlamp's humid ray, a car stood at the curb with its motor running: every single drop on its hood was trembling Who could have written it? Fyodor could not make a final choice among several émigré critics This one was scrupulous but untalented; that one, dishonest but gifted, a third wrote only about prose; a fourth only about his friends; a fifth . . . and Fyodor's imagination conjured up this fifth one: a man the same age as he or even, he thought, a year younger, who had published during those same years in those same émigré papers and magazines, no more than he (a poem here, an article there), but who in some incomprehensible manner, which seemed as physically natural as some kind

of emanation, had unobtrusively clothed himself in an aura of indefinable fame, so that his name was uttered not necessarily especially often, but quite differently from all the other young names; a man whose every new searing line he, Fyodor, despising himself, quickly and avidly devoured in a corner, trying by the very act of reading to destroy the marvel of it—after which for two days or so he could not rid himself either of what he had read or of his own feeling of debility or of a secret ache, as if while wrestling with another he had injured his own innermost, sacrosanct particle; a lonely, unpleasant, myopic man, with some kind of unpleasant defect in the reciprocal position of his shoulder blades. But I shall forgive everything if it is you.

He thought he was keeping his pace to a dawdle, yet the clocks that he came across on the way (the emergent giants of watchmakers' shops) advanced even more slowly and when, almost at his destination, he overtook in one stride Lyubov Markovna, who was going to the same place, he understood that he had been borne along throughout his journey by his impatience, as by an escalator that transforms even a motionless man into a runner.

Why did this flabby, unloved, elderly woman still make up her eyes when she already wore a pince-nez? The lenses exaggerated the unsteadiness and crudity of the amateurish ornamentation and as a result, her perfectly innocent gaze became so ambiguous that one could not break away from it: the hypnosis of error. In fact nearly everything about her seemed based on an unfortunate misunderstanding—and one wondered if it was not even a form of insanity when she thought that she spoke German like a native, that Galsworthy was a great writer, or that Georgiy Ivanovich Vasiliev was pathologically attracted to her. She was one of the most faithful frequenters of the literary parties that the Chernyshevskis, together with Vasiliev, a fat old journalist, organized every other Saturday; today was only Tuesday; and Lyubov Markovna was still living on her impressions from the previous Saturday, sharing them generously. Men fatally became absentminded boors in her company. Fyo-

dor himself felt he was slipping too, but fortunately they were coming to the front door and there the Chernyshevskis' maid already stood waiting, keys in hand, actually, she had been sent to meet Vasiliev, who suffered from an extremely rare disease of the heart valves—he had, in fact, made a hobby of it and sometimes arrived at the home of friends with an anatomical model of the heart and demonstrated everything very clearly and lovingly. "*We* don't need the elevator," said Lyubov Markovna and started up the stairs with a strong plodding gait which turned to a curiously smooth and silent swing on the landings; Fyodor had to zigzag behind her at a reduced pace, as you sometimes see a dog do, weaving and shoving its nose past its master's heel now on the right, now on the left.

They were admitted by Alexandra Yakovlevna herself Fyodor had scarcely time to notice her unusual expression (as if she disapproved of something or wanted to avert something quickly), when her husband darted into the hallway on his short plump legs, waving a newspaper as he ran

"Here it is," he shouted, the corner of his mouth violently jerking downward (a tic acquired since the death of his son) "Look, here it is!"

"When I married him," observed Mme. Chernyshevski, "I expected his humor to be more subtle."

Fyodor saw with surprise that the paper he uncertainly took from his host was a German one

"The date!" shouted Chernyshevski. "Go ahead, look at the date, young man!"

"April 1," said Fyodor with a sigh, and unconsciously he folded up the paper. "Yes, of course, I should have remembered"

Chernyshevski began to guffaw ferociously.

"Don't be cross with him, please," said his wife in an ·lently sorrowful tone, slightly rolling her hips and ly taking the young man by the wrist.

yubov Markovna clicked her purse shut and sailed off ward the parlor.

It was a smallish, rather tastelessly furnished, badly lighted room with a shadow lingering in one corner and a pseudo-Tanagra vase standing on an unattainable shelf, and when at last the final guest had arrived and Mme. Chernyshevski, becoming for a moment—as usually happens—remarkably similar to her own (blue, gleaming) teapot, began to pour tea, the cramped quarters assumed the guise of a certain touching, provincial coziness. On the sofa, among cushions of various hue—all of them unappetizing and blurry—a silk doll with an angel's limp legs and a Persian's almond-shaped eyes was being squeezed alternately by two comfortably settled persons: Vasiliev, huge, bearded, wearing prewar socks arrowed above the ankle; and a fragile, charmingly debilitated girl with pink eyelids, in general appearance rather like a white mouse; her first name was Tamara (which would have better suited the doll), and her last was reminiscent of one of those German mountain landscapes that hang in picture-framing shops. Fyodor sat by the bookshelf and tried to simulate good spirits, despite the lump in his throat. Kern, a civil engineer, who prided himself on having been a close acquaintance of the late Alexander Blok (the celebrated poet), was producing a gluey sound as he extracted a date from an oblong carton. Lyubov Markovna carefully examined the pastries on a large plate with a poorly pictured bumblebee and, suddenly botching her investigation, contented herself with a bun—the sugar-powdered kind that always bears an anonymous fingerprint. The host was telling an ancient story about a medical student's April Fool's prank in Kiev. . . . But the most interesting person in the room sat a little distance apart, by the writing desk, and did not take part in the general conversation—which, however, he followed with quiet attention. He was a youth somewhat resembling Fyodor—not so much in facial features (which at that moment were difficult to distinguish) but in the tonality of his general appearance: the dunnish auburn shade of the round head which was closely cropped (a style which, according to the rules of latter-day St. Petersburg romanti-

and wavers' mean exactly—in the poem about the bicycle?"

Fyodor explained, relying more on gestures than on words: "You know, when you are learning to ride a bike and you sort of swerve from side to side."

"Doubtful expression," remarked Vasiliev.

"My favorite is the one about children's diseases, yes," said Alexandra Yakovlevna, nodding to herself, "that's good: Christmastime scarlet fever and Eastertime diphtheria."

"Why not the other way around?" inquired Tamara.

Oh, how the boy had loved poetry! The glass-doored bookcase in the bedroom was full of his books: Gumilyov and Hérédia, Blok and Rilke—and how much he knew by heart! And the notebooks. . . . One day she and I will have to sit down and go through it all. She has the strength to do it, I don't. Strange how one keeps postponing things. One would think it would be a pleasure—the only, the bitter pleasure—to go through the belongings of the dead, yet his stuff goes on lying there, untouched (the provident laziness of one's soul?); it is unthinkable that a stranger should touch it, but what a relief it would be if an accidental fire were to destroy that precious little cabinet. Chernyshevski abruptly got up and, as if by chance, moved the chair by the desk in such a way that neither it nor the shadows of the books could serve as a theme for the phantom.

By then the talk had shifted to some unlamented Soviet politician who had fallen from power after Lenin's death. "Oh, in the years I knew him he was at the 'height of glory and good deeds,'" the journalist Vasiliev was saying, professionally misquoting Pushkin (who has "hope," not "height").

The boy who looked like Fyodor (to whom the Chernyshevskis had become so attached for this very reason) was now by the door, where he paused before leaving the room, half turning toward his father—and, despite his

purely imaginary nature, how much more substantial he was than all those sitting in the room! The sofa could be seen through Vasiliev and the pale girl! Kern, the engineer, was represented only by the glint of his pince-nez; so was Lyubov Markovna, and Fyodor himself existed only because of a vague congruity with the deceased—while Yasha was perfectly real and live, and only the instinct of self-preservation prevented one from taking a good look at his features

But perhaps, thought Fyodor, perhaps, this is all wrong, perhaps he [Alexander Yakovlevich Chernyshevski] is not imagining his dead son at all right now as I imagine him doing He may be really occupied with the conversation and if his eyes are wandering it may be only because he has always been fidgety, poor soul I am unhappy, I am bored, nothing rings true here and I don't know why I keep sitting here, listening to nonsense

However he still continued to sit there and smoke and gently swing the toe of his foot—and while the others talked on and he talked on himself, he tried as he did everywhere and always to imagine the inner, transparent motion of this or that other person. He would carefully seat himself inside the interlocutor as in an armchair, so that the other's elbows would serve as armrests for him, and his soul would fit snugly into the other's soul—and then the lighting of the world would suddenly change and for a minute he would actually become Alexander Chernyshevski, or Lyubov Markovna, or Vasiliev. Sometimes a sporting excitement would be added to the seltzerlike effervescence of the transformation, and he felt flattered when a chance word aptly confirmed the train of thought he was divining in the other He, to whom so-called politics (that ridiculous sequence of pacts, conflicts, aggravations, frictions, discords, collapses, and the transformation of perfectly innocent little towns into the names of international treaties) meant nothing, would sometimes immerse himself with a thrill of curiosity and revulsion into the vast bowels of Vasiliev and live for an instant actuated by his, Vasiliev's,

inner mechanism, where next to the "Locarno" button there was one for "Lockout" and where a pseudo-clever, pseudo-entertaining game was conducted by such ill-matched symbols as "The Five Kremlin Rulers," or "The Kurd Rebellion," or individual surnames that had lost all human connotations: Hindenburg, Marx, Painlevé, Herriot (whose macrocephalic initial in Russian, the reverse E, had become so autonomous in the columns of Vasiliev's *Gazeta* as to threaten a complete rift with the original Frenchman); this was a world of prophetic utterances, presentiments, mysterious combinations; a world that was in fact a hundredfold more spectral than the most abstract dream. And when Fyodor moved over into Mme. Chernyshevski he found himself within a soul where not everything was alien to him, but where he marveled at many things, as a prim traveler might marvel at the customs in a distant land. the bazaar at sunrise, the naked children, the din, the monstrous size of fruit. This forty-five-year-old, plain, indolent woman, who two years ago had lost her only son, had suddenly come alive: mourning had given her wings and tears had rejuvenated her—or at any rate so said those who had known her before. The memory of her son, which in her husband had become an illness, burned in her with a quickening fervor. It would be incorrect to say that this fervor filled her completely, no, it far exceeded the confines of her soul, seeming even to ennoble the absurdity of these two rented rooms into which, after the tragedy, she and her husband had moved from the large In den Zelten apartment (where her brother had lived with his family back in the years before the war) Now she regarded all her friends only in the light of their receptivity toward her loss, and also, for greater precision, recalled or imagined Yasha's opinion of this or that individual with whom she had to keep up acquaintance. She was seized with the fever of activity, with the thirst for an abundant response; her child grew within her and struggled to issue forth; the literary circle newly founded by her husband jointly with Vasiliev, in order to give himself and her something to do,

ones that did not exist—in reality, the little there was within us corresponded to the little there was without), and I doubt we would have become friends if he and I had ever met. His somberness, interrupted by the sudden shrill gaiety characteristic of humorless people; the sentimentality of his intellectual enthusiasms; his purity, which would have strongly suggested timidity of the senses were it not for the morbid overrefinement of their interpretation; his feeling for Germany; his tasteless spiritual throes ("For a whole week," he said, "I was in a daze"—after reading Spengler!); and finally his poetry . . . in short, everything that to his mother was filled with enchantment only repelled me. As a poet he was, in my opinion, very feeble; he did not create, he merely dabbled in poetry, just as thousands of intelligent youths of his type did; but if they did not meet with some kind of more or less heroic death—having nothing to do with Russian letters, which, however, they knew meticulously (oh, those notebooks of Yasha's, filled with prosodic diagrams expressing modulations of rhythm in the tetrameter!)—they subsequently abandoned literature altogether, and if they exhibited talent in some field, it would be in science or administration, or else simply in a well-ordered life His poems, replete with fashionable clichés, exalted his "grievous" love of Russia—autumn scenes à la Esenin, the smoky blue of Blok-ish bogs, the powder snow upon the wooden paving blocks of Mandelshtam's neoclassicism, and the Neva's granite parapet on which one can scarcely discern today the imprint of Pushkin's elbow. His mother would read them to me, stumbling in her agitation, with an awkward schoolgirl intonation which did not at all suit those tragically scudded iambics; Yasha himself must have recited them in an oblivious singsong, dilating his nostrils and swaying in the bizarre blaze of a kind of lyric pride, after which he would immediately sink back, again becoming humble, limp and withdrawn The sonorous epithets that lived in his throat—*neveroyatnyy* (incredible), *hladnyy* (cold), *prekrasnyy* (beautiful)—epithets avidly employed by the young poets

of his generation under the delusion that archaisms, prosaisms, or simply destitute words, having completed their life cycle, now, when used in poems, gained a kind of unexpected freshness, returning from the opposite direction—these words in Mme. Chernyshevski's stumbling diction made, as it were, another half cycle, faded away again, and again revealed their decrepit poverty—thus exposing the deception of style. Besides patriotic elegies, Yasha had poems about the low haunts of adventurous sailors, about gin and jazz (which he pronounced, in the German way, as "yatz"), and poems about Berlin, in which he attempted to endow German proper names with a lyric voice in the same way, for instance, as Italian street names resound in Russian poetry with a suspiciously euphonious contralto; he also had poems dedicated to friendship, without rhyme and without meter, full of muddled, hazy and timid emotions, of some internal spiritual bickerings, and apostrophes to a male friend in the polite form (the Russian "*vy*"), as a sick Frenchman addresses God, or a young Russian poetess her favorite gentleman. And all this was expressed in a pale, haphazard manner, with many vulgarisms and incorrect word accents peculiar to his provincial middle-class set. Misled by its augmentative suffix, he assumed that "*pozharishche*" (the site of a recent fire) meant a "big fire," and I also remember a rather pathetic reference to "Vrublyov's frescoes"—an amusing cross between two Russian painters (Rublyov and Vrubel) that only served to prove our dissimilarity: no, he could not have loved painting as I do My true opinion of his poetry I concealed from his mother, while the forced sounds of inarticulate approbation that I politely made were construed by her as signs of incoherent rapture. For my birthday she gave me, beaming through her tears, Yasha's best necktie, an old-fashioned affair of watered silk, freshly ironed, with, still discernible, the label of a well-known but not elegant shop: I hardly think Yasha himself ever wore it; and in exchange for everything which she had shared with me, for her giving me a complete and detailed image of her late son, with his

poetry, his neurasthenia, his enthusiasms, his death, Mme. Chernyshevski imperiously demanded from me a certain amount of creative collaboration. Her husband, who was proud of his century-old name and spent hours entertaining guests with its history (his grandfather had been baptized in the reign of Nicholas I—in Volsk, I believe—by the father of the famous political writer Chernyshevski, a stout, energetic Greek Orthodox priest who liked to do missionary work among the Jews, and who, on top of the spiritual benison, would bestow upon converts the added bonus of his last name), said to me on numerous occasions, "Look, you ought to write a little book in the form of a *biographie romancée* about our great man of the sixties—Now, now, stop frowning, I can foresee all your objections, but believe me, there are, after all, cases where the fascinating beauty of a good man's dedicated life fully redeems the falsity of his literary views, and Nikolay Chernyshevski was indeed a heroic soul If you should decide to describe his life, there are many curious things I could tell you." I had no desire at all to write about the great man of the sixties and even less to write about Yasha, as his mother persistently counseled for her part (so that, taken together, here was an order for a complete history of their family). But, while I was both amused and irritated by these efforts of theirs to channel my muse, I nevertheless felt that before long Mme. Chernyshevski would have me cornered and, just as I was compelled to put on Yasha's necktie on my visits to her (until it occurred to me to say I was saving it for special occasions), I would have to undertake writing a long short story depicting Yasha's fate. At one time I was even weak enough (or bold enough, perhaps) to ponder how I might tackle the subject, if by any chance . . . Any corny man of ideas, any "serious" novelist in horn-rimmed glasses—the family doctor of Europe and the seismographer of its social tremors—would no doubt have found in this story something highly characteristic of the "frame of mind of young people in the postwar years"—a combination of words which in itself (even apart from the "general

idea" it conveyed) made me speechless with scorn. I used to feel a cloying nausea when I heard or read the latest drivel, vulgar and humorless drivel, about the "symptoms of the age" and the "tragedy of youth." And, since I could not be kindled by Yasha's tragedy (though his mother did think I was afire), I would have become enmired involuntarily in a "deep" social-interest novel with a disgusting Freudian reek. My heart stood still as I exercised my imagination, probing with my toe, is it were, the mica-thin ice over the puddle; I would go so far as to picture myself making a fair copy of my work and bringing it to Mme. Chernyshevski, seating myself in such a way that the lamp would illuminate my fatal road from the left (thank you, I can see fine this way), and after a brief foreword about how difficult it had been, about the sense of responsibility I felt . . . but here everything would be obscured by the crimson mist of shame. Fortunately I did not fulfill the order—I am not sure exactly what saved me: for one thing, I kept putting it off too long: for another, certain blessed intervals occurred between our meetings; and then perhaps Mme. Chernyshevski herself grew a little bored with me as a listener; be that as it may, the story remained unused by the writer—a story that was in fact very simple and sad.

Yasha and I had entered Berlin University at almost exactly the same time, but I did not know him although we must have passed each other many times Diversity of subjects—he took philosophy, I studied infusoria—diminished the possibility of our association. If I were to return now into that past, enriched in but one respect—awareness of the present day—and retrace exactly all my interlooping steps, then I would certainly notice his face, now so familiar to me through snapshots. It is a funny thing, when you imagine yourself returning into the past with the contraband of the present, how weird it would be to encounter there, in unexpected places, the prototypes of today's acquaintances, so young and fresh, who in a kind of lucid lunacy do not recognize you; thus a woman, for instance, whom one loves since yesterday, appears as a young girl,

standing practically next to one in a crowded train, while the chance passerby who fifteen years ago asked you the way in the street now works in the same office as you. Among this throng of the past only a dozen or so faces would acquire this anachronistic importance: low cards transfigured by the radiance of the trump. And then how confidently one could . . . But alas, even when you do happen, in a dream, to make such a return journey, then, at the border of the past your present intellect is completely invalidated, and amid the surroundings of a classroom hastily assembled by the nightmare's clumsy property man, you again do not know your lesson—with all the forgotten shades of those school throes of old.

At the university Yasha made close friends with two fellow students, Rudolf Baumann, a German, and Olya G., a compatriot—the Russian-language papers did not print her name in full She was a girl of his age and set, even, I think, from the same town as he. Their families, however, were not acquainted. Only once did I have a chance to see her, at a literary soirée about two years after Yasha's death—I remember her remarkably broad and clear forehead, her aquamarine eyes and her large red mouth with black fuzz over the upper lip and a plump mole at the wick; she stood with her arms folded across her soft bosom, at once arousing in me all the proper literary associations, such as the dust of a fair summer evening and the threshold of a highway tavern, and a bored girl's observant gaze As for Rudolf, I never saw him myself and can conclude only from the words of others that he had pale blond hair brushed back, was swift in his movements and handsome—in a hard, sinewy way, remindful of a gundog. Thus I use a different method to study each of the three individuals, which affects both their substance and their coloration, until, at the last minute, the rays of a sun that is my own and yet is incomprehensible to me, strikes them and equalizes them in the same burst of light.

Yasha kept a diary and in those notes he neatly defined the mutual relationship between him, Rudolf and Olya as

"a triangle inscribed in a circle." The circle represented the normal, simple, "Euclidian" (as he put it) friendship that united all three, so that if it alone had existed their union would have remained happy, carefree and unbroken. But the triangle inscribed within it was a different system of relationships, complex, agonizing and slow in forming, which had an existence of its own, quite independent of its common enclosure of uniform friendship. This was the banal triangle of tragedy, formed within an idyllic circle, and the mere presence of such a suspiciously neat structure, to say nothing of the fashionable counterpoint of its development, would never have permitted me to make it into a short story or novel.

"I am fiercely in love with the soul of Rudolf," wrote Yasha in his agitated, neoromantic style. "I love its harmonious proportions, its health, the joy it has in living I am fiercely in love with this naked, suntanned, lithe soul, which has an answer to everything and proceeds through life as a self-confident woman does across a ballroom floor. I can imagine only in the most complex, abstract manner, next to which Kant and Hegel are child's play, the fierce ecstasy I would experience if only . . . If only what? What can I do with his soul? This is what kills me—this yearning for some most mysterious tool (thus Albrecht Koch yearned for "golden logic" in the world of madmen). My blood throbs, my hands grow icy like a schoolgirl's when I remain alone with him, and he knows this and I become repulsive to him and he does not conceal his disgust. I am fiercely in love with his soul—and this is just as fruitless as falling in love with the moon"

Rudolf's squeamishness is understandable, but if one looks at the matter more closely, one suspects that Yasha's passion was perhaps not so abnormal after all, that his excitement was after all very much akin to that of many a Russian youth in the middle of last century, trembling with happiness when, raising his silky eyelashes, his pale-browed teacher, a future leader, a future martyr, would turn to him; and I would have refused to see in Yasha's case an incor-

rigible deviation had Rudolf been to the least degree a teacher, a martyr, or a leader; and not what he really was, a so-called "Bursch," a German "regular guy," notwithstanding a certain propensity for obscure poetry, lame music, lopsided art—which did not affect in him that fundamental soundness by which Yasha was captivated, or thought he was.

The son of a respectable fool of a professor and a civil servant's daughter, he had grown up in wonderful bourgeois surroundings, between a cathedral-like sideboard and the backs of dormant books. He was good-natured although not good; sociable, and yet a little skittish; impulsive, and at the same time calculating. He fell in love with Olya conclusively after a bicycle ride with her and Yasha in the Black Forest, a tour which, as he later testified at the inquest, "was an eye-opener for all three of us"; he fell in love with her on the lowest level, primitively and impatiently, but from her he received a sharp rebuff, made all the stronger by the fact that Olya, an indolent, grasping, morosely freakish girl, had in her turn (in those same fir woods, by the same round, black lake) "realized she had fallen for" Yasha, who was just as oppressed by this as Rudolf was by Yasha's ardor, and as she herself was by the ardor of Rudolf, so that the geometric relationship of their inscribed feelings was complete, reminding one of the traditional and somewhat mysterious interconnections in the *dramatis personae* of eighteenth-century French playwrights where X is the *amante* of Y ("the one in love with Y") and Y is the *amant* of Z ("the one in love with Z").

By winter, the second winter of their friendship, they had become clearly aware of the situation; the winter was spent in studying its hopelessness. On the surface everything seemed to be fine: Yasha read incessantly; Rudolf played hockey, masterfully speeding the puck across the ice; Olya studied the history of art (which, in the context of the epoch, sounds—as does the tone of the entire drama in question—like an unbearably typical, and therefore false, note); within, however, a hidden agonizing torment was

growing, which became formidably destructive the moment that these unfortunate young people began to find some pleasure in their threefold torture

For a long time they abided by a tacit agreement (each knowing, shamelessly and hopelessly, everything about the others) never to mention their feelings when the three of them were together, but whenever one of them was absent, the other two would inevitably set to discussing his passion and his suffering For some reason they celebrated New Year's Eve in the restaurant of one of the Berlin railroad stations—perhaps because at railroad stations the armament of time is particularly impressive—and then they went slouching through the varicolored slush of grim festive streets, and Rudolf ironically proposed a toast to the exposure of their friendship—and since that time, at first discreetly, but soon with all the rapture of frankness, they would jointly discuss their feelings with all three present. It was then that the triangle began to erode its circumference.

The elder Chernyshevskis, as well as Rudolf's parents and Olya's mother (a sculptress, obese, black-eyed, and still handsome, with a low voice, who had buried two husbands and used to wear long necklaces that looked like bronze chains), not only did not sense that something doomful was growing, but would have confidently replied (should an aimless questioner have turned up among the angels already converging, already swarming and fussing professionally around the cradle where lay a dark little newborn revolver) that everything was all right, that everybody was happy. Afterwards, though, when everything had happened, their cheated memories made every effort to find in the routine past course of identically tinted days, traces and evidence of what was to come—and, surprisingly, they would find them. Thus Mme. G., paying a call of condolence on Mme Chernyshevski, fully believed what she was saying when she insisted she had had presentiments of the tragedy for a long time—since the very day when she had come into the half-dark drawing room where. in motionless poses on a couch, in the various sorrowful inclinations of

allegories on tombstone bas-reliefs, Olya and her two friends were sitting in silence; this was but a fleeting momentary harmony of shadows, but Mme. G. professed to have noticed that moment, or, more likely, she had set it aside in order to return to it a few months later.

By spring the revolver had grown. It belonged to Rudolf, but for a long time passed inconspicuously from one to the other, like a warm ring sliding on a string in a parlor game, or a playing card with Black Mary. Strange as it may seem, the idea of disappearing, all three together, in order that—already in a different world—an ideal and flawless circle might be restored, was being developed most actively by Olya, although now it is hard to determine who first proposed it and when. The role of poet in this enterprise was taken by Yasha—his position seemed the most hopeless since, after all, it was the most abstract; there are, however, sorrows that one does not cure by death, since they can be treated much more simply by life and its changing yearnings: a material bullet is powerless against them, while on the other hand, it copes perfectly well with the coarser passions of hearts like Rudolf's and Olya's.

A solution had now been found and discussions of it became especially fascinating. In mid-April, at the flat the Chernyshevskis then had, something happened that apparently served as the final impulse for the *dénouement*. Yasha's parents had peacefully left for the cinema across the street. Rudolf unexpectedly got drunk and let himself go, Yasha dragged him away from Olya and all this happened in the bathroom, and presently Rudolf, in tears, was picking up the money that had somehow fallen out of his trouser pockets, and what oppression all three felt, what shame, and how tempting was the relief offered by the finale scheduled for the next day.

After dinner on Thursday the eighteenth, which was also the eighteenth anniversary of the death of Olya's father, they equipped themselves with the revolver, which had become by now quite burly and independent, and in light, flimsy weather (with a damp west wind and the violet rust

of pansies in every garden) set off on streetcar fifty-seven for the Grunewald where they planned to find a lonely spot and shoot themselves one after the other. They stood on the rear platform of the tram, all three wearing raincoats, with pale puffy faces—and Yasha's big-peaked cap, which he had not worn for about four years and had for some reason put on today, gave him an oddly plebeian look; Rudolf was hatless and the wind ruffled his blond hair, thrown back from the temples; Olya stood leaning against the rear railing, gripping the black stang with a white, firm hand that had a prominent ring on its index finger—and gazed with narrowed eyes at the streets flicking by, and all the time kept stepping by mistake on the treadle of the gentle little bell in the floor (intended for the huge, stone-like foot of the motorman when the rear of the car became the front) This group was noticed from inside the car, through the door, by Yuliy Filippovich Posner, former tutor of a cousin of Yasha's. Leaning out quickly—he was an alert, self-confident person—he beckoned to Yasha, who, recognizing him, went inside.

"Good thing I ran across you," said Posner, and after he had explained in detail that he was going with his five-year-old daughter (sitting separately by a window with her rubber-soft nose pressed against the glass) to visit his wife in a maternity ward, he produced his wallet and from the wallet his calling card, and then, taking advantage of an accidental stop made by the car (the trolley had come off the wire on a curve), crossed out his old address with a fountain pen and wrote the new one above it. "Here," he said, "give this to your cousin as soon as he comes back from Basel and remind him, please, that he still has several of my books which I need, which I need very much "

The tramcar was speeding along the Hohenzollerndamm and on its rear platform Olya and Rudolf continued to stand just as sternly as before in the wind, but a certain mysterious change had occurred by the act of leaving them alone, although only for a minute (Posner and his daughter got off very soon), Yasha had, as it were, broken the al-

liance and had initiated his separation from them, so that when he rejoined them on the platform he was, though as much unaware of it as they were, already on his own and the invisible crack, in keeping with the law governing all cracks, continued irresistibly to creep and widen.

In the solitude of the spring forest where the wet, dun birches, particularly the smaller ones, stood around blankly with all their attention turned inside themselves; not far from the dove-gray lake (on whose vast shore there was not a soul except for a little man who was tossing a stick into the water at the request of his dog) they easily found a convenient lonely spot and right away got down to business; to be more exact, Yasha got down to business: he had that honesty of spirit that imparts to the most reckless act an almost everyday simplicity. He said he would shoot himself first by right of seniority (he was a year older than Rudolf and a month older than Olya) and this simple remark rendered unnecessary the stroke of drawn lots, which, in its coarse blindness, would probably have fallen on him anyway; and throwing off his raincoat and without bidding his friends farewell (which was only natural in view of their identical destination), silently, with clumsy haste, he walked down the slippery, pine-covered slope into a ravine heavily overgrown with scrub oak and bramble bushes, which, despite April's limpidity, completely concealed him from the others.

These two stood for a long time waiting for the shot. They had no cigarettes with them, but Rudolf was clever enough to feel in the pocket of Yasha's raincoat where he found an unopened pack, The sky had grown overcast, the pines were rustling cautiously and it seemed from below that their blind branches were groping for something. High above and fabulously fast, their long necks extended, two wild ducks flew past, one slightly behind the other. Afterwards Yasha's mother used to show the visiting card, DIPL. ING. JULIUS POSNER, on the reverse of which Yasha had written in pencil, *Mummy, Daddy, I am still alive, I am very scared, forgive me.* Finally Rudolf could stand it no

longer and climbed down to see what was the matter with him. Yasha was sitting on a log among last year's still unanswered leaves, but he did not turn, he only said: "I'll be ready in a minute." There was something tense about his back, as if he were controlling an acute pain. Rudolf rejoined Olya, but no sooner had he reached her than both of them heard the dull pop of the shot, while in Yasha's room life went on for a few more hours as if nothing had happened—the cast-off banana skin on a plate, the volume of Annenski's poems *The Cypress Chest* and that of Khodasevich's *The Heavy Lyre* on the chair by the bed, the ping-pong bat on the couch, he was killed outright, to revive him, however, Rudolf and Olya dragged him through the bushes to the reeds and there desperately sprinkled him and rubbed him, so that he was all smudged with earth, blood and silt when the police later found the body. Then the two began calling for help, but nobody came: architect Ferdinand Stockschmeisser had long since left with his wet setter.

They returned to the place where they had waited for the shot and here dusk begins to fall on the story. The one clear thing is that Rudolf, whether because a certain terrestrial vacancy had opened for him or because he was simply a coward, lost all desire to shoot himself, and Olya, even if she had persisted in her intention, could do nothing since he had immediately hidden the revolver In the woods, where it had grown cold and dark, with a blind drizzle crepitating around, they remained for a long time until a stupidly late hour. Rumor has it that it was then that they became lovers, but this would be really too flat At about midnight, at the corner of a street poetically named Lilac Lane, a police sergeant listened skeptically to their horrible, voluble tale There is a kind of hysterical state that assumes the semblance of childish swaggering

If Mme Chernyshevski had met Olya immediately after the event then perhaps some kind of sentimental sense would have come of it for them both. Unfortunately the meeting occurred only several months later, because, in the

first place, Olya went away, and in the second, Mme. Chernyshevski's grief did not immediately take on that industrious, and even enraptured, form that Fyodor found when he came on the scene. Olya was in a certain sense unlucky: it so happened that Olya had come back for her step-brother's engagement party and the house was full of guests; and when Mme. Chernyshevski arrived without warning, beneath a heavy mourning veil, with a choice selection from her sorrowful archives (photographs, letters) in her handbag, all prepared for the rapture of shared tears, she was met by a morosely polite, morosely impatient young woman in a semitransparent dress, with blood-red lips and a fat white-powdered nose, and one could hear from the little side room where she took her guest the wailing of a phonograph, and of course no communion of souls came of it. "All I did was to take a long look at her," recounted Mme. Chernyshevski—after which she carefully snipped off, on many little snapshots, both Olya and Rudolf; the latter, however, had visited her at once and had rolled at her feet and pounded his head on the soft corner of the divan, and then had walked off with his wonderful bouncy stride down the Kurfürstendamm, which glistened after a spring shower.

Yasha's death had its most painful effect on his father. He had to spend the whole summer in a sanatorium and he never really recovered: the partition dividing the room temperature of reason from the infinitely ugly, cold, ghostly world into which Yasha had passed suddenly crumbled, and to restore it was impossible, so that the gap had to be draped in makeshift fashion and one tried not to look at the stirring folds. Ever since that day the other world began to seep into his life; but there was no way of resolving this constant intercourse with Yasha's spirit and he finally told his wife about it, in the vain hope that he might thus render harmless a phantom that secrecy had nurtured: the secrecy must have grown back, for soon he again had to seek the tedious, essentially mortal, glass-and-rubber help of doctors. Thus he lived only half in our world, at which he

them, they opened fire with revolvers and in the ensuing gunplay a bullet killed the merry merchant's three-year-old son.

"Listen, we ought to change the subject," Mme. Chernyshevski said softly. "I am afraid to have my husband listen to things like that. You do have a new poem, don't you? Fyodor Konstantinovich is going to read us a poem," she proclaimed loudly, but Vasiliev, half reclining, having in one hand a monumental cigarette holder with a nicotineless cigarette, and with the other absentmindedly tousling the doll, which was executing all kinds of emotional evolutions in his lap, nevertheless went on for a good half minute about how that gay incident had been investigated in court the previous day.

"I haven't got anything with me, and I don't know anything by heart," Fyodor repeated several times.

Chernyshevski quickly turned to him and put his small hairy hand on his sleeve. "I have a feeling you are still cross with me. You're not? Word of honor? I realized afterwards what a cruel joke it was. You don't look well. How are things going? You never really did explain to me why you changed your lodgings."

He explained: at the boardinghouse where he had lived for a year and a half people he knew had suddenly moved in, very kind, innocently intrusive bores who kept "dropping in for a chat." Their room was near his and before long Fyodor had the feeling that the wall between them had crumbled and he was defenseless. Of course, in the case of Yasha's father no change of residence could possibly have helped.

Vasiliev had got up. Whistling softly, his huge back bent slightly, he was examining the books on the shelves; he pulled one out, opened it, stopped whistling and, wheezing instead, began reading the first page to himself. His place on the couch was taken by Lyubov Markovna and her large purse: now that her tired eyes were naked, her expression grew softer, as with a seldom humored hand she stroked the golden back of Tamara's head.

"Yes!" Vasiliev said abruptly, slamming the book shut and cramming it into the first available opening. "All things in the world must end, comrades. As for me, I must get up at seven tomorrow."

Engineer Kern took a look at his wrist.

"Oh, stay a while longer," said Mme. Chernyshevski, her blue eyes beaming imploringly, and turning to the engineer, who had risen and stood behind his empty chair which he slightly moved to one side (thus a Russian merchant who has drunk his fill of tea might turn his glass upside down on its saucer), she started talking about the lecture he had agreed to deliver at the next Saturday meeting—its title was "Alexander Blok in the War."

"I put 'Blok and War' on the announcements by mistake," she said, "but it doesn't make any difference, does it?"

"On the contrary, it certainly does make a difference," replied Kern with a smile on his thin lips, but with murder behind his thick eyeglasses, without unclasping his hands which were joined on his abdomen. "'Blok in the War' conveys the proper meaning—the personal nature of the speaker's own observations, while 'Blok and War,' if you will excuse me, is philosophy."

And now they all began gradually to grow less distinct, to ripple with the random agitation of a fog, and then to vanish altogether, their outlines, weaving in figure-eight patterns, were evaporating, though here and there a bright point still glowed—the cordial glint in an eye, the gleam of a bracelet, there was also a momentary reappearance of the intently furrowed forehead of Vasiliev, who was shaking somebody's already dissolving hand, and at the very last there was a floating glimpse of pistachio-colored straw, decorated with silk roses (Lyubov Markovna's hat), and now everything was gone, and into the smoky parlor, without a sound, in his bedroom slippers, came Yasha, thinking that his father had already retired, and with a magic tinkling, by the light of crimson lanterns, dim beings were repairing the pavement at the corner of the square,

and Fyodor, who did not have money for the streetcar, was walking home. He had forgotten to borrow from the Chernyshevskis those two or three marks that would have tided him over until he got paid for a lesson or translation: this thought alone would not have disturbed him had he not been possessed by a general feeling of wretchedness consisting of that rotten disappointment (he had imagined so vividly the success of his book), and a chill leak in his left shoe, and fear of the imminent night in a new place. He was tired, he was dissatisfied with himself for wasting the tender beginning of the night, and he was tormented by the feeling that there was some line of thought he had not pursued to its conclusion that day and now could never finish

He was walking along streets that had already long since insinuated themselves into his acquaintance—and as if that were not enough, they expected affection; they had even purchased in advance, in his future memories, space next to St. Petersburg, an adjacent grave; he walked along these dark, glossy streets and the blind houses retreated, backing or sidling into the brown sky of the Berlin night, which, nevertheless, had its soft spots here and there, spots that would melt under one's gaze, allowing it to obtain a few stars. Here at last is the square where we dined and the tall brick church and the still quite transparent poplar, resembling the nervous system of a giant; here, also, is the public toilet, reminiscent of Baba Yaga's gingerbread cottage. In the gloom of the small public garden crossed obliquely by the faint light of a streetlamp, the beautiful girl who for the last eight years had kept refusing to be incarnated (so vivid was the memory of his first love), was sitting on a cinder-gray bench, but when he got closer he saw that only the bent shadow of the poplar trunk was sitting there. He turned into his street, plunging in it as in cold water—he was so loath to go back, such melancholy was promised him by that room, that malevolent wardrobe, that daybed. He located his front door (disguised by darkness) and pulled out his keys. None of them would open the door.

"What's this . . ." he muttered crossly, looking at the

key bit, and then furiously began jamming it in again. "What the hell!" he exclaimed and retreated one step in order to throw back his head and make out the house number Yes, it was the right house. He was just about to bend over the lock once more when a sudden truth dawned upon him: these were, of course, the boardinghouse keys, which he had carried away in his raincoat pocket by mistake when he moved today, and the new ones must have remained in the room that he now wanted to get into much more than a moment ago.

In those days Berlin janitors were for the most part opulent bullies who had corpulent wives and belonged, out of petty bourgeois considerations, to the Communist Party. White Russian tenants quailed before them: accustomed to subjection, we everywhere appoint over ourselves the shadow of supervision. Fyodor understood perfectly well how stupid it was to be afraid of an old fool with a bobbing Adam's apple, but still he could not bring himself to wake him up after midnight, to summon him up out of his giant featherbed, to perform the act of pushing the button (even though it was more than likely that no one would answer, squeeze as he might); he could not bring himself to do it, especially because he did not have that ten-pfennig coin without which it was unthinkable to walk past the palm, grimly cupped at hip level, confident of receiving its tribute.

"What a mess, what a mess," he whispered, stepping away and feeling, from behind, the weight of a sleepless night settling on him from head to heels, a leaden twin whom he must carry somewhere or other. "How stupid, *kak glupo,*" he added, pronouncing the Russian *glupo* with a soft French "l" as his father used to do in a mildly jocular absentminded way, when perplexed.

He wondered what to do next. Wait for somebody to come out? Try to find the black-caped night watchman who looked after door locks on residential streets? Force himself after all to blow up the house by ringing the bell? Fyodor began pacing the sidewalk to the corner and back. The street was echoic and completely empty High above it

milk-white lamps were suspended, each on its own transverse wire; beneath the closest one a ghostly circle swung with the breeze across the wet asphalt. And this swinging motion, which had no apparent relation to him, with a sonorous tambourine-like sound nevertheless nudged something off the brink of his soul where that something had been resting, and now, no longer with the former distant call but reverberating loudly and close by, rang out "Thank you, my land, for your remotest . . ." and immediately, on a returning wave, "most cruel mist my thanks are due. . . ." And again, flying off in search of an answer: ". . . by you unnoticed. . . ." He was somnambulistically talking to himself as he paced a nonexistent sidewalk; his feet were guided by local consciousness, while the principal Fyodor Konstantinovich, and in fact the only Fyodor Konstantinovich that mattered, was already peering into the next shadowy strophe, which was swinging some yards away and which was destined to resolve itself in a yet-unknown but specifically promised harmony. "Thank you, my land . . ." he began again, aloud, gathering momentum afresh, but suddenly the sidewalk turned back to stone under his feet, everything around him began speaking at once, and, instantly sobered, he hurried to the door of his house, for now there was a light behind it.

A middle-aged woman with high cheekbones, a karakul jacket over her shoulders, was letting a man out and had paused together with him at the door. "So don't forget to do it, dear," she was saying in a drab, everyday voice, when Fyodor arrived grinning and immediately recognized her: that morning she and her husband had been meeting their furniture. But he also recognized the visitor who was being let out—it was the young painter Romanov, whom he had run into a couple of times at the editorial offices of the *Free Word*. With an expression of surprise on his delicate face, whose Hellenic purity was spoiled by dull, crooked teeth, he greeted Fyodor; the latter awkwardly bowed to the lady, who was rearranging the jacket slipping from her shoulder, and then bounded up the stairs with enormous strides,

tripped horribly at the bend and climbed on holding the banister. Bleary-eyed Frau Stoboy in her dressing gown was awesome, but that did not last long. In his room he groped for the light and found it with difficulty. On the table he saw the glistening keys and the white book. That's already all over, he thought. Such a short time ago he had been giving copies to friends with pretentious or platitudinous inscriptions and now he was ashamed to recall those dedications and how all these last few days he had been nurtured by the joy of his book. But after all, nothing much had happened: today's deception did not exclude a reward tomorrow or after tomorrow; somehow, however, the dream had begun to cloy and now the book lay on the table, completely enclosed within itself, delimited and concluded, and no longer did it radiate those former powerful, glad rays

A moment later, in bed, just as his thoughts had begun to settle down for the night and his heart to sink in the snow of slumber (he always had palpitations when falling asleep), Fyodor ventured imprudently to repeat to himself the unfinished poem—simply to enjoy it once more before the separation by sleep; but he was weak, and it was strong, twitching with avid life, so that in a moment it had conquered him, covered his skin with goose pimples, filled his head with a heavenly buzz, and so he again turned on the light, lit a cigarette, and lying supine, the sheet pulled up to his chin and his feet protruding, like Antokolski's Socrates (one toe lost to Lugano's damp), abandoned himself to all the demands of inspiration. This was a conversation with a thousand interlocutors, only one of whom was genuine, and this genuine one must be caught and kept within hearing distance How difficult this is, and how wonderful. . . . And in these talks between tamtambles, tamtam my spirit hardly knows . . .

After some three hours of concentration and ardor dangerous to life, he finally cleared up the whole thing, to the last word, and decided that tomorrow he would write it

down. In parting with it he tried reciting softly the good, warm, farm-fresh lines:

Thank you, my land, for your remotest
Most cruel mist my thanks are due.
By you possessed, by you unnoticed,
Unto myself I speak of you.
And in these talks between somnambules
My inmost being hardly knows
If it's my demency that rambles
Or your own melody that grows.

And realizing only now that this contained a certain meaning, he followed it through with interest and approved it. Exhausted, happy, with ice-cold soles (the statue lies half-naked in a gloomy park), still believing in the goodness and importance of what he had performed, he got up to turn off the light. In his torn nightshirt, with his skinny chest and long turquoise-veined, hairy legs exposed, he dawdled by the mirror, still with that same solemn curiosity examining and not quite recognizing himself, those broad eyebrows, that forehead with its projecting point of close-cropped hair. A small vessel had burst in his left eye and the crimson invading it from the canthus imparted a certain gypsy quality to the dark glimmer of the pupil. Goodness, what a growth on those hollow cheeks after a few nocturnal hours, as if the moist heat of composition had stimulated the hair as well! He turned the switch, but most of the night had dissolved and all the pale and chilled objects in the room stood like people come to meet someone on a smoky railroad platform.

For a long time he could not fall asleep: discarded word-shells obstructed and chafed his brain and prickled his temples and there was no way he could get rid of them. Meanwhile the room had grown quite light and somewhere—most likely in the ivy—crazy sparrows, all together, not listening to each other, shrilled deafeningly: big recess in a little school.

Thus began his life in his new hole. His landlady could

not get used to his habits of sleeping till noon, lunching none knew how or where, and dining off greasy wrapping paper. His book of poems did not get any reviews after all (somehow he had assumed it would happen automatically and had not even taken the trouble of sending out review copies), except for a brief note in Vasiliev's *Gazeta*, signed by the financial correspondent, who expressed an optimistic view of his literary future and quoted one stanza with a deadly misprint. He came to know Tannenberg Street better and it yielded him all its fondest secrets: such as the fact that next door in the basement lived an old shoemaker by the name of Kanarienvogel and there actually was a bird cage, although minus its yellow captive, in his purblind window, among samples of repaired footwear; but as for Fyodor's shoes, the cobbler looked at him over the top of the steel-rimmed spectacles of his guild and refused to repair them; so Fyodor started thinking of buying a new pair. He also learned the name of the upstairs tenants: having zoomed one day by mistake to the top landing, he read on a brass nameplate *Carl Lorentz, Geschichtsmaler,* and one day Romanov, whom he met at a street corner and who shared a studio in another part of the city with the *Geschichtsmaler,* told Fyodor a few things about him: he was a toiler, a misanthrope and a conservative, who had spent his whole life painting parades, battles, the imperial phantom with his star and ribbon, haunting the Sans-Souci park—and who now, in the uniformless republic, was impoverished and begloomed. He had enjoyed before 1914 a distinguished reputation, had visited Russia to paint the Kaiser's meeting with the Tsar, and while wintering in St. Petersburg had met his present wife, Margarita Lvovna, who was at the time a young and enchanting dilettante who dabbled in all the arts. His alliance in Berlin with the Russian émigré painter had begun by accident, as a result of a newspaper advertisement. This Romanov was of quite a different cut Lorentz developed a sullen attachment to him, but since the day of Romanov's first exhibition (in which he showed his portrait of Countess d'X, stark naked

with corset marks on her stomach, holding her own self diminished to one-third life-size) had considered him a madman and a swindler. Many, however, were captivated by the young artist's bold and original gift; extraordinary successes were predicted for him and some even saw in him the originator of a neonaturalist school: after passing through all the trials of so-called modernism, he was said to have arrived at a renovated, interesting and somewhat cold narrative art. In his early works a certain trace of the cartoonist's style was still evident—for example, in that thing of his called "Coincidence," where, on an advertising post, among the vivid, remarkably harmonious colors of playbills, astral names of cinemas and other transparent motley, one could read a notice about a lost diamond necklace (with a reward to the finder), which necklace lay right there on the sidewalk, at the very foot of the post, its innocent fire sparkling. In his "Autumn," though, the black tailor's dummy with its ripped side, dumped in a ditch among magnificent maple leaves, was already expressiveness of a purer quality; connoisseurs found in it an abyss of sadness. But his best work to date remained one that had been acquired by a discerning tycoon and had already been extensively reproduced, called "Four Citizens Catching a Canary"; all four were in black, broad-shouldered, top-hatted (although for some reason one of them was barefoot), and placed in odd, exultant and at the same time wary poses beneath the strikingly sunny foliage of a squarely trimmed linden tree in which hid the bird, perhaps the one that had escaped from my shoemaker's cage. I was obscurely thrilled by Romanov's strange, beautiful, yet venomous art; I perceived in it both a forestalling and a forewarning: having far outdistanced my own art, it simultaneously illuminated for it the dangers of the way. As for the man himself, I found him boring to the point of revulsion—I could not stand his extremely rapid, extremely lisping speech, accompanied by a totally irrelevant, automatic rolling of his shining eyes. "Listen," he said, spitting at my chin, "why don't you let me introduce you to Mar-

garita Lorentz—she has told me to bring you over some night—do come, we hold little soirées at the studio—you know, with music, sandwiches, red lampshades—a lot of young people come—the Polonski girl, the Shidlovski brothers, Zina Mertz . . ."

These names were unknown to me; I felt no desire to spend evenings in the company of Vsevolod Romanov, nor did Lorentz's pug-faced wife interest me in any way—so not only did I not accept the invitation, but since that time I began avoiding the artist.

In the morning the potato-hawker's cry *"Prima Kartoffel!"* rang out in the street, in a high, disciplined singsong (but how the young vegetable's heart throbs!) or else a sepulchral bass proclaimed *"Blumenerde!"* The thump of rugs being beaten was sometimes joined by a hurdy-gurdy, which was painted brown and mounted on squalid cart wheels, with a circular design on its front depicting an idyllic brook; and cranking now with his right hand, now with his left, the sharp-eyed organ-grinder pumped out a thick "O sole mio." That sun was already inviting me into the square. In its garden a young chestnut tree, still unable to walk alone and therefore supported by a stake, suddenly came out with a flower bigger than itself. The lilacs, however, did not bloom for a long time; but when they finally made up their mind, then, within one night, which left a considerable number of cigarette butts under the benches, they encircled the garden with ruffled richness. In a quiet lane behind the church the locust trees shed their petals on a gray June day, and the dark asphalt next to the sidewalk looked as if cream of wheat had been spilled on it In the rose beds around the statue of a bronze runner the Dutch Glory disengaged the corners of its red petals and was followed by General Arnold Janssen. One happy and cloudless day in July, a very successful ant flight was staged. the females would take to the air, and the sparrows, also taking to the air, would devour them; and in places where nobody bothered them they kept crawling along the gravel and shedding their feeble prop-room

wings. From Denmark the papers reported that as a result of a heat wave there, numerous cases of insanity were being observed: people were tearing off their clothes and jumping into the canals. Male gypsy moths dashed about in wild zigzags. The lindens went through all their involved, aromatic, messy metamorphoses.

Fyodor, in his shirt-sleeves and with sneakers on his sockless feet, would spend the greater part of the day on an indigo bench in the public garden, a book in his long tanned fingers; and when the sun beat down too hard, he would lean his head on the hot back of the bench and shut his eyes for long periods; the ghostly wheels of the city day revolved through the interior bottomless scarlet, and the sparks of children's voices darted past, and the book, open in his lap, became ever heavier and more unbooklike; but now the scarlet darkened under a passing cloud, and lifting his sweaty neck, he would open his eyes and once again see the park, the lawn with its marguerites, the freshly watered gravel, the little girl playing hopscotch with herself, the pram with the baby consisting of two eyes and a pink rattle, and the journey of the blinded, breathing, radiant disk through the cloud—then everything would blaze once again and along the dappled street, lined with restless trees, a coal truck would thunder by with the grimy driver on his high, bumpy seat, clenching the stalk of an emerald-bright leaf in his teeth.

In the late afternoon he would go to give a lesson—to a businessman with sandy eyelashes, who looked at him with a dull gaze of malevolent perplexity as Fyodor unconcernedly read him Shakespeare; or to a schoolgirl in a black jumper, whom he sometimes felt like kissing on her bent yellowish nape; or to a jolly thickset fellow who had served in the imperial navy, who said *est'* (aye-aye) and *obmozgovat'* (to dope it out), and was preparing *dat' drapu* (to blow) to Mexico, escaping secretly from his mistress, a two-hundred-pound, passionate and doleful old woman who had happened to flee to Finland in the same sleigh as he and since then, in perpetual jealous despair, had

scraper as he scratched his large bearded cheek with one finger and narrowed his eye, overhung by a raffish black brow without a single gray hair in it—remembered in Russia to this day. By the window (outside which there was a similar multi-office building, with repairs going on so high in the sky that it seemed as though they might as well do something about the ragged rent in the gray cloud bank) stood a bowl with an orange and a half and an appetizing jar of yogurt, and in the bookcase, in its locked bottom compartment, forbidden cigars and a large blue-and-red heart were preserved. A table was cluttered with the old trash of Soviet newspapers, cheap books with lurid covers, letters—requesting, reminding, rebuking—the squeezed-out half of an orange, a newspaper page with a window cut out and a portrait photograph of Vasiliev's daughter, who lived in Paris, a young woman with a charming bare shoulder and smoky hair: she was an unsuccessful actress and there was frequent mention of her in the cinema column of the *Gazeta:* ". . . our talented compatriot Silvina Lee . . ."—although no one had ever heard of the compatriot.

Vasiliev would good-humoredly accept Fyodor's poems and print them, not because he liked them (generally he did not even read them) but because it was absolutely immaterial to him what adorned the nonpolitical part of his paper. Having ascertained once for all the level of literacy below which a given contributor by nature could not fall, Vasiliev gave him a free hand, even if the given level barely rose above zero. And poems, since they were mere trifles, passed almost entirely without control, trickling through openings where rubbish of greater weight and volume would have got stuck. But what joyful, exciting squealing arose in all the peacock coops of our émigré poetry from Latvia to the Riviera! They've printed mine! And mine! Fyodor himself, who felt he had only one rival—Koncheyev (who, by the way, was not a contributor to the *Gazeta*)—did not concern himself with his neighbors in print and rejoiced over his poems no less than the others. There were

times when he could not wait for the evening mail that brought his copy and instead would buy one half an hour earlier in the street, and shamelessly, scarcely having left the newsstand, catching the reddish light near the fruit-stands where mountains of oranges glowed in the blue of early twilight, would unfold the paper—and sometimes find nothing something else had squeezed it out; but if he found it, he would gather the pages more conveniently and, resuming his progress along the sidewalk, read his poem over several times, varying the inner intonations; that is, imagining one by one the various mental ways the poem would be read, perhaps was now being read, by those whose opinion he considered important—and with each of these different incarnations he would almost physically feel a change in the color of his eyes, and also in the color behind his eyes, and in the taste in his mouth, and the more he liked the chef-d'oeuvre du jour, the more perfectly and succulently he could read it through the eyes of others

Having thus dawdled away the summer, having given birth to, raised, and stopped loving forever some two dozen poems, he went out one clear and cool day, a Saturday (tonight is the meeting), to make an important purchase The fallen leaves lay not flat on the sidewalk but warped and stiffly crumpled so that from under each protruded a blue corner of shadow. Carrying a broom, the little old woman in a clean apron, with a small sharp face and disproportionately large feet, came out of her gingerbread cottage with its candy windows Yes, it was autumn! He walked happily, everything was fine: morning had brought a letter from his mother, who was planning to come and visit him at Christmas, and through his deteriorating summer footwear he felt the ground with extraordinary sensitivity when he walked across an unpaved section, next to deserted vegetable-garden plots with their faint burnt odor, between houses which turned the sliced-off blackness of their outer walls toward them, and there, in front of lacy bowers, grew cabbages beaded with large bright drops, and the bluish stalks of withered carnations, and sunflowers,

their heavy bulldog faces bowed. For a long time he had wanted to express somehow that it was in his feet that he had the feeling of Russia, that he could touch and recognize all of her with his soles, as a blind man feels with his palms. And it was a pity when he reached the end of that stretch of rich brown earth and once again had to step along the resonant sidewalk.

A young woman in a black dress, with a shiny forehead and quick, wandering eyes, sat down at his feet for the eighth time, sideways on a stool, nimbly extracted a narrow shoe from the rustling interior of its box, spread her elbows apart as she slackened the edges, glanced abstractedly aside as she loosened the laces, and then, producing a shoehorn from her bosom, addressed Fyodor's large, shy, poorly darned foot. Miraculously the foot fit inside, but having done so, went completely blind: the wiggling of toes inside had no effect on the exterior smoothness of the taut black leather. With phenomenal speed the salesgirl tied the lace ends and touched the tip of the shoe with two fingers. "Just right," she said. "New shoes are always a little . . ." she went on rapidly, raising her brown eyes. "Of course if you wish, we can make some adjustments. But they fit perfectly, see for yourself!" And she led him to the X-ray gadget and showed him where to place his foot. Looking down in the glass aperture he saw, against a luminous background, his own dark, neatly separated phalanges. With this, with this I'll step ashore. From Charon's ferry. Putting on the other shoe as well, he walked along the carpet the length of the store and back, glancing sideways at the ankle-high mirror which reflected his beautiful step and his trouser leg, now looking twice its age. "Yes, they're fine," he said cravenly. When he was a child they used to scrape the glossy black sole with a buttonhook so it would not be slippery. He carried them off to his lesson under his arm, came home, ate, put them on, admiring them apprehensively, and left for the meeting.

They do seem all right after all—for an agonizing beginning.

The meeting was at the smallish, pathetically ornate flat of some relatives of Lyubov Markovna's. A red-haired girl in a green dress that ended above her knees was helping the Estonian maid (who was conversing with her in a loud whisper) to serve the tea Among the familiar crowd, which contained few new faces, Fyodor at once descried Koncheyev, who was attending for the first time He looked at the round-shouldered, almost humpbacked figure of this unpleasantly quiet man whose mysteriously growing talent could have been checked only by a ringful of poison in a glass of wine—this all-comprehending man with whom he had never yet had a chance to have the good talk he dreamt of having some day and in whose presence he, writhing, burning and hopelessly summoning his own poems to come to his aid, felt himself a mere contemporary. That young face was of the Central-Russian type and seemed a little common, common in a kind of oddly old-fashioned way; it was bounded above by wavy hair and below by starched collar wings, and at first in the presence of this man, Fyodor experienced a glum discomfort. . . . But three ladies were smiling at him from the sofa, Chernyshevski was salaaming to him from afar, Getz was raising like a banner a magazine he had brought for him, which contained Koncheyev's "Beginning of a Long Poem" and an article by Christopher Mortus entitled "The Voice of Pushkin's Mary in Contemporary Poetry." Behind him somebody pronounced with the intonation of an explanatory response, "Godunov-Cherdyntsev." Never mind, never mind, Fyodor thought rapidly, smiling to himself, looking around and tapping the end of a cigarette against his eagle-emblazoned cigarette case, never mind, we'll still clink eggs some day, he and I, and we'll see whose will crack

Tamara was indicating a vacant chair to him, and as he made his way to it he again thought he heard the sonorous ring of his name When young people of his age, lovers of poetry, followed him on occasion with that special gaze that glides like a swallow across a poet's mirrory heart, he would feel inside him the chill of a quickening, bracing

pride; it was the forerunner of his future fame; but there was also another, earthly fame—the faithful echo of the past: he was proud of the attention of his young coevals, but no less proud of the curiosity of older people, who saw in him the son of a great explorer, a courageous eccentric who had discovered new animals in Tibet, the Pamirs and other blue lands.

"Here," said Mme. Chernyshevski with her dewy smile, "I want you to meet. . . ." She introduced him to one Skvortsov, who had recently escaped from Moscow; he was a friendly fellow, had raylike lines around his eyes, a pear-shaped nose, a thin beard and a dapper, youthful, melodiously talkative little wife in a silk shawl—in short, a couple of that more or less academic type that was so familiar to Fyodor through his memory of the people who used to flicker around his father. Skvortsov in courteous and correct terms began by expressing his amazement at the total lack of information abroad about the circumstances surrounding the death of Konstantin Kirillovich: "We'd thought," his wife put in, "that if nobody knew anything back home, that was to be expected." "Yes," Skvortsov continued, "I recall terribly clearly how one day I happened to be present at a dinner in honor of your father, and how Kozlov—Pyotr Kuzmich—the explorer, remarked wittily that Godunov-Cherdyntsev looked upon Central Asia as his private game reserve. Yes . . . That was quite a time ago, I don't think you were born then."

At this point Fyodor suddenly noticed that Mme. Chernyshevski was directing a sorrowful, meaningful, sympathy-laden gaze at him. Curtly interrupting Skvortsov, he began questioning him, without much interest, about Russia. "How shall I put it . . ." replied the latter. "You see it's like this . . ."

"Hello, hello, dear Fyodor Konstantinovich!" A fat lawyer who resembled an overfed turtle shouted this over Fyodor's head, although already shaking his hand while pushing through the crowd, and by now he was already greeting someone else. Then Vasiliev rose from his seat and

leaning lightly on the table for a moment with splayed fingers, in a position peculiar to shopkeepers and orators, announced that the meeting was opened. "Mr. Busch," he added, "will now read us his new, philosophical tragedy."

Herman Ivanovich Busch, an elderly, shy, solidly built, likable gentleman from Riga, with a head that looked like Beethoven's, seated himself at the little Empire table, emitted a throaty rumble and unfolded his manuscript; his hands trembled perceptibly and continued to tremble throughout the reading.

From the very beginning it was apparent that the road led to disaster. The Rigan's farcical accent and bizarre solecisms were incompatible with the obscurity of his meaning. When, already in the Prologue, there appeared a "Lone Companion" (*odinokiy sputnik* instead of *odinokiy putnik,* lone wayfarer) walking along that road, Fyodor still hoped against hope that this was a metaphysical paradox and not a traitorous *lapsus.* The Chief of the Town Guard, not admitting the traveler, repeated several times that he "would not pass definitely" (rhyming with "nightly"). The town was a coastal one (the lone companion was coming from the Hinterland) and the crew of a Greek vessel was carousing there. This conversation went on in the Street of Sin:

FIRST PROSTITUTE

All is water. That is what my client Thales says.

SECOND PROSTITUTE

All is air, young Anaximenes told me.

THIRD PROSTITUTE

All is number. My bald Pythagoras cannot be wrong.

FOURTH PROSTITUTE

Heraclitus caresses me whispering "All is fire."

LONE COMPANION (*enters*)

All is fate.

There were also two choruses, one of which somehow managed to represent the de Broglie's waves and the logic of history, while the other chorus, the good one, argued with it. "First Sailor, Second Sailor, Third Sailor," continued Busch, enumerating the conversing characters in his nervous bass voice edged with moisture. There also appeared three flower vendors: "Lilies' Woman," a "Violets' Woman" and a "Woman of Different Flowers." Suddenly something gave: little landslides began among the audience.

Before long, certain power lines formed in various directions all across the room—a network of exchanged glances between three or four, then five or six, then ten people, which represented a third of the gathering. Koncheyev slowly and carefully took a large volume from the bookshelf near which he was sitting (Fyodor noticed that it was an album of Persian miniatures), and just as slowly turning it this way and that in his lap, he began to glance through it with myopic eyes. Mme. Chernyshevski wore a surprised and hurt expression, but in keeping with her secret ethics, somehow tied up with the memory of her son, she was forcing herself to listen. Busch was reading rapidly, his glossy jowls gyrated, the horseshoe in his black tie sparkled, while beneath the table his feet stood pigeon-toed—and as the idiotic symbolism of the tragedy became ever deeper, more involved and less comprehensible, the painfully repressed, subterraneously raging hilarity more and more desperately needed an outlet, and many were already bending over, afraid to look, and when the Dance of the Maskers began in the square, someone—Getz it was—coughed, and together with the cough there issued a certain additional whoop, whereupon Getz covered his face with his hands and after a while emerged again with a senselessly bright countenance and humid, bald head, while on the couch Tamara had simply lain down and was rocking as if in the throes of labor, while Fyodor, who was deprived of protection, shed floods of tears, tortured by the forced noiselessness of what was going on inside him. Unex-

pectedly Vasiliev turned in his chair so ponderously that a leg collapsed with a crack and Vasiliev lurched forward with a changed expression, but did not fall, and this event, not funny in itself, served as a pretext for an elemental, orgiastic explosion to interrupt the reading, and while Vasiliev was transferring his bulk to another chair, Herman Ivanovich Busch, knitting his magnificent but quite unfruitful brow, jotted something on the manuscript with a pencil stub, and in the relieved calm an unidentified woman uttered something in a separate final moan, but Busch was already going on:

LILIES' WOMAN

You're all upset about something today, sister.

WOMAN OF DIFFERENT FLOWERS

Yes, the fortuneteller told me that my daughter would marry yesterday's passerby.

DAUGHTER

Oh, I did not even notice him.

LILIES' WOMAN

And he did not notice her.

"Hear, hear!" chimed in the Chorus, as in the British Parliament. Again there was a slight commotion: an empty cigarette box, on which the fat lawyer had written something, began a journey across the whole room, and everybody followed the stages of its trip; something extremely funny must have been written on it, but no one read it and it was passed dutifully from hand to hand, destined for Fyodor, and when it finally reached him, he read on it: *Later I want to discuss a certain little affair with you.*

The last act was nearing its conclusion. The god of laughter imperceptibly forsook Fyodor and he gazed meditatively at the shine of his shoe. Onto the cold shore from the ferry. The right one pinched more than the left. Koncheyev, his mouth half open, was leafing through the final

pages of the album. "*Zanaves* [curtain]," exclaimed Busch, accenting the last syllable instead of the first.

Vasiliev announced that there would be an intermission. Most of the audience had a rumpled and wilted look, as after a night in a third-class coach. Busch had rolled his tragedy into a thick tube and was standing in a far corner, and it seemed to him that in the din of voices there formed and spread constant ripples of admiration; Lyubov Markovna offered him some tea and then his powerful face suddenly assumed a defenseless, gentle expression, and blissfully licking his lips, he bent toward the glass that had been handed him. Fyodor observed this from afar with a certain feeling of awe, while behind him he heard the following:

"Please give me some explanation!" (The angry voice of Mme. Chernyshevski.)

"Well, you know, such things do happen . . ." (guiltily debonair Vasiliev).

"I ask you for an explanation."

"But, my dear lady, what can I do now?"

"Well, didn't you read it beforehand? Didn't he bring it to you at the office? I thought you said it was a serious, interesting work. A significant work."

"Yes, that's true, a first impression you know, when I skimmed it—I did not take into consideration how it would sound—I was fooled! It's really baffling. But go over to him, Alexandra Yakovlevna, say something to him."

The lawyer grasped Fyodor above the elbow. "You're just the person I'm looking for. It suddenly occurred to me that there is something for you here A client of mine came to me—he requires a German translation of some papers of his, for a divorce case, don't you see? The Germans who are handling the affair for him have a Russian girl in their office but apparently she will be able to do only part of it, and they need someone to help her out with the rest Would you undertake this? Here, let me take your telephone number. *Gemacht.*"

"Ladies and gentlemen, be seated please," rang out

Vasiliev's voice. "Now we shall have a discussion of the work that has been read. Those who wish to participate please sign up."

Just then Fyodor saw that Koncheyev, stooping and with his hand behind his lapel, was making a serpentine course toward the exit. Fyodor followed, nearly forgetting his magazine in the process. In the anteroom they were joined by old Stupishin; he frequently moved from one rented room to another but lived always so far from the center of the city that these changes, important and complicated for him, seemed to others to happen in an ethereal world, beyond the horizon of human worries. Draping a skimpy, gray-striped scarf around his neck, he held it in place with his chin in the Russian manner while, also in the Russian manner, he got into his overcoat by means of several dorsal jerks.

"Well, he certainly gave us a treat," he said as they descended, accompanied by the maid with the front door key.

"I confess I didn't listen very carefully," commented Koncheyev.

Stupishin went to wait for a rare, almost legendary streetcar, while Godunov-Cherdyntsev and Koncheyev set out in the opposite direction, to walk as far as the corner.

"What nasty weather," said Godunov-Cherdyntsev.

"Yes, it's quite cold," agreed Koncheyev.

"Rotten—And in what part do you live?"

"Charlottenburg."

"Well, well, that's quite a way You're walking?"

"Oh yes, walking I think that here I must . . ."

"Yes, you turn right, I go straight."

They said good-by. "Brr, what a wind!"

"Wait, wait a minute though—I'll see you home. Surely you're a night owl like me and I don't have to expound to you on the black enchantment of stone promenades. So you didn't listen to our poor lecturer?"

"Only at the beginning, and then only with half an ear. However, I don't think it was quite as bad as that."

"You were examining Persian miniatures in a book. Did you not notice one—an amazing resemblance!—from the collection of the St. Petersburg Public Library—done, I think, by Riza Abbasi, say about three hundred years ago: that man kneeling, struggling with baby dragons, big-nosed, mustachioed—Stalin!"

"Yes, I think *that* one is the strongest of the lot. By the way, I've read your very remarkable collection of poems. Actually, of course, they are but the models of your future novels."

"Yes, some day I'm going to produce prose in which 'thought and music are conjoined as are the folds of life in sleep.'"

"Thanks for the courteous quotation. You have a genuine love of literature, don't you?"

"I believe so. You see, the way I look at it, there are only two kinds of books: bedside and wastebasket. Either I love a writer fervently, or throw him out entirely."

"A bit severe, isn't it? And a bit dangerous. Don't forget that the whole of Russian literature is the literature of one century and, after the most lenient eliminations, takes up no more than three to three and a half thousand printed sheets, and scarcely one-half of this is worthy of the bookshelf, to say nothing of the bedside table. With such quantitative scantiness we must resign ourselves to the fact that our Pegasus is piebald, that not everything about a bad writer is bad, and not all about a good one good."

"Perhaps you will give me some examples so that I can refute them."

"Certainly: if you open Goncharov or—"

"Stop right there! Don't tell me you have a kind word for Oblomov—that first 'Ilyich' who was the ruin of Russia—and the joy of social critics? Or you want to discuss the miserable hygienic conditions of Victorian seductions? Crinoline and damp garden bench? Or perhaps the style? What about his 'Precipice' where Rayski at moments of pensiveness is shown with 'rosy moisture shimmering between his lips'?—which reminds me somehow of Pisem-

ski's protagonists, each of whom under the stress of violent emotion 'massages his chest with his hand!' "

"Here I shall trap you. Aren't there some good things in the same Pisemski? For example, those footmen in the vestibule, during a ball, who play catch with a lady's velveteen boot, horribly muddy and worn. Aha! And since we are speaking of second-rank authors, what do you think of Leskov?"

"Well, let me see . . . Amusing Anglicisms crop up in his style, such as *'eto byla durnaya veshch'* [this was a bad thing] instead of simply *'plokho delo.'* As to his contrived punning distortions—No, spare me, I don't find them funny. And his verbosity—Good God! His 'Soboryane' could easily be condensed to two newspaper *feuilletons.* And I don't know which is worse—his virtuous Britishers or his virtuous clerics."

"And yet . . . how about his image of Jesus 'the ghostly Galilean, cool and gentle, in a robe the color of ripening plum'? Or his description of a yawning dog's mouth with 'its bluish palate as if smeared with pomade'? Or that lightning of his that at night illumines the room in detail, even to the magnesium oxide left on a silver spoon?"

"Yes, I grant you he has a Latin feeling for blueness: *lividus.* Lyov Tolstoy, on the other hand, preferred violet shades and the bliss of stepping barefoot with the rooks upon the rich dark soil of plowed fields! Of course, I should never have bought them."

"You're right, they pinch unbearably. But we have moved up to the first rank Don't tell me you can't find weak spots there too? In such stories as 'The Blizzard'—

"Leave Pushkin alone. he is the gold reserve of our literature. And over there is Chekhov's hamper, which contains enough food for years to come, and a whimpering puppy, and a bottle of Crimean wine."

"Wait, let's go back to the forebears Gogol? I think we can accept his 'entire organism.' Turgenev? Dostoevski?"

"Bedlam turned back into Bethlehem—that's Dos-

toevski for you. 'With one reservation,' as our friend Mortus says. In the 'Karamazovs' there is somewhere a circular mark left by a wet wine glass on an outdoor table. That's worth saving if one uses your approach."

"But don't tell me all is well with Turgenev? Remember those inept tête-à-têtes in acacia arbors? The growling and quivering of Bazarov? His highly unconvincing fussing with those frogs? And in general, I don't know if you can stand the particular intonation of the Turgenevian row of dots at the close of a 'fading phrase' and the maudlin endings of his chapters. Or should we forgive all his sins because of the gray sheen of Mme. Odintsev's black silks and the outstretched hind legs of some of his graceful sentences, those rabbitlike postures assumed by his resting hounds?"

"My father used to find all kinds of howlers in Turgenev's and Tolstoy's hunting scenes and descriptions of nature, and as for the wretched Aksakov, let's not even discuss his disgraceful blunders in that field."

"Now that the dead bodies have been removed we might, perhaps, proceed to the poets? All right By the way, speaking of dead bodies, has it ever occurred to you that in Lermontov's most famous short poem the 'familiar corpse' at the end is extremely funny? What he really wanted to say was 'corpse of the man she once knew.' The posthumous acquaintance is unjustified and meaningless."

"Of late it's Tyutchev who shares my night lodgings most often."

"A worthy house guest. And how do you feel about Nekrasov's iambics—or don't you have a taste for him?"

"Oh, I do. There is, in his best verse, a certain guitar twang, a sob and a gasp, which for instance Fet, a more refined artist, somehow lacks."

"I have a feeling that Fet's secret weakness is his rationality and stress on antitheses—This hasn't escaped you, has it?"

"Our oafish school-of-social-intent writers criticized him for the wrong reasons. No, I can forgive him everything for

'rang out in the darkening meadow,' for 'dew-tears of rapture shed the night,' for the wing-fanning, 'breathing' butterfly."

"And so we move on to the next century: mind the step. You and I began to rave about poetry in our boyhood, didn't we? Refresh my memory—how did it go?—'how the rims of the clouds palpitate' . . Poor old Balmont!"

"Or, illuminated from Blok's side, 'Clouds of chimerical solace' Oh, but it would have been a crime to be choosy here My mind in those days accepted ecstatically, gratefully, completely, without critical carpings, all of the five poets whose names began with 'B'—the five senses of the new Russian poetry"

"I'd be interested to know which of the five represents taste Yes, yes, I know—there are aphorisms that, like airplanes, stay up only while they are in motion. But we were talking about the dawn How did it begin with you?"

"When my eyes opened to the alphabet. Sorry, that sounds pretentious, but the fact is, since childhood I have been afflicted with the most intense and elaborate *audition colorée*."

"So that you too, like Rimbaud, could have—"

"Written not a mere sonnet but a fat opus, with auditive hues he never dreamt of. For instance, the various numerous '*a*'s of the four languages which I speak differ for me in tinge, going from lacquered-black to splintery-gray—like different sorts of wood I recommend to you my pink flannel '*m*' I don't know if you remember the insulating cotton wool which was removed with the storm windows in spring? Well, that is my Russian '*y*,' or rather 'ugh,' so grubby and dull that words are ashamed to begin with it If I had some paints handy I would mix burnt-sienna and sepia for you so as to match the color of a gutta-percha '*ch*' sound; and you would appreciate my radiant '*s*' if I could pour into your cupped hands some of those luminous sapphires that I touched as a child, trembling and not understanding when my mother, dressed for a ball, uncon-

trollably sobbing, allowed her perfectly celestial treasures to flow out of their abyss into her palm, out of their cases onto black velvet, and then suddenly locked everything up and did not go anywhere after all, in spite of the impassioned persuasions of her brother, who kept pacing up and down the rooms giving fillips to the furniture and shrugging his epaulets, and if one turned the curtain slightly on the side window of the oriel, one could see, along the receding riverfront, façades in the blue-blackness of the night, the motionless magic of an imperial illumination, the ominous blaze of diamond monograms, colored bulbs in coronal designs . . ."

"*Buchstaben von Feuer,* in short . . . Yes, I know what is coming. Shall I finish this banal and soul-rending tale for you? How you delighted in any poem that happened along. How at ten you were writing dramas, and at fifteen elegies—and all about sunsets, sunsets . . . Blok's 'Incognita' who 'passed slowly in between the drunkards.' By the way, who was she?"

"A young married woman. It lasted a little less than two years, until my escape from Russia She was lovely and sweet—you know, with large eyes and slightly bony hands —and somehow I have remained faithful to her even to this day. Her taste in poetry was limited to fashionable gypsy lyrics, she adored poker and she died of typhus—God knows where, God knows how."

"And what comes now? Would you say it's worth going on writing verse?"

"Oh, decidedly! To the very end. Even at this moment I am happy, in spite of the degrading pain in my pinched toes. To tell the truth, I again feel that turbulence, that excitement. . . . Once again I shall spend the whole night . . ."

"Show me. Let's see how it works: It is with *this,* that from the slow black ferry . . . No, try again: Through snow that falls on water never freezing . . . Keep trying: Under the vertical slow snow in gray-enjambment-Lethean

weather, in the usual season, with *this* I'll step upon the shore some day. That's better but be careful not to squander the excitement."

"Oh that's all right. My point is that one cannot help being happy with this tingling sensation in the skin of your brow. . . ."

". . . as from an excess of vinegar in chopped beet Do you know what has just occurred to me? That river is not the Lethe but rather the Styx. Never mind Let's proceed· And now a crooked bough looms near the ferry, and Charon with his boathook, in the dark, reaches for it, and catches it, and very ."

". . slowly the bark revolves, the silent bark Homeward, homeward! I feel tonight like composing with pen in hand What a moon! What a black smell of leaves and earth from behind those railings "

"And what a pity no one has overheard the brilliant colloquy that I would have liked so much to hold with you."

Never mind, it won't be wasted. In fact, I'm glad it turned out this way. Whose business is it that actually we parted at the very first corner, and that I have been reciting a fictitious dialogue with myself as supplied by a self-teaching handbook of literary inspiration?

Chapter Two

THE RAIN still fell lightly, but with the elusive suddenness of an angel, a rainbow had already appeared. In languorous self-wonder, pinkish-green with a purplish suffusion along its inner edge, it hung suspended over the reaped field, above and before a distant wood, one tremulous portion of which showed through it. Stray arrows of rain that had lost both rhythm and weight and the ability to make any sound, flashed at random, this way and that, in the sun. Up the rain-washed sky, from behind a raven cloud, a cloud of ravishing whiteness was extricating itself and shining with all the detail of a monstrously complicated molding.

"Well, well, it's over," he said in a low voice and emerged from under the shelter of aspens that crowded where the greasy, clayey *zemskaya* (rural district) road—and what a bump in this designation[1]—descended into a hollow, gathering there all its ruts into an oblong pit, full to the brim with thick café crème.

My darling! Pattern of Elysian hues! Once in Ordos my father, climbing a hill after a storm, inadvertently entered the base of a rainbow—the rarest occurrence!—and found himself in colored air, in a play of light as if in paradise. He took one more step—and left paradise.

The rainbow was already fading. The rain had quite

stopped, it was scorching hot, a horsefly with satiny eyes settled on his sleeve A cuckoo began to call in a copse, listlessly, almost questioningly· the sound swelled like a cupule, and again, like a cupule, unable to find a solution. The poor, fat bird probably flew further away, for everything was repeated from the beginning in the manner of a reduced reflection (it sought, who knows, a place for the best, the saddest effect). A huge butterfly, flat in flight, bluish-black with a white band, described a supernaturally smooth arc, settled on the damp earth, closed its wings and with that disappeared This is the kind that now and then a panting peasant lad brings one, cramming it with both hands into his cap. This is the kind that soars up from under the mincing hooves of the doctor's well-behaved little pony, when the doctor, holding the almost superfluous reins in his lap or else simply tying them to the front board, pensively drives along the shady road to the hospital. But on occasion you find four black-and-white wings with brick-colored undersides scattered like playing cards over a forest footpath: the rest, eaten by an unknown bird.

He jumped a puddle where two dung-beetles had fastened onto a straw, getting in each other's way, and printed his sole on the edge of the road: a highly significant footprint, ever looking upward and ever seeing him who has vanished Walking through a field, alone, beneath the magnificently rushing clouds, he remembered how, with his first cigarettes in his first cigarette case, he had approached an old reaper here and asked for a light; the peasant had taken out a box from his gaunt breast and given it to him unsmilingly, but the wind was blowing, match after match went out before it had hardly flared and after every one he grew more ashamed, while the man watched with a kind of detached curiosity the impatient fingers of the wasteful young squire.

He went deeper into the wood; planks had been laid along the path, black and slimy, with reddish-brown aments and leaves that had stuck to them Who was this had dropped a russula, breaking open its white fan? In reply

came the sound of hallooing: girls were gathering mushrooms and bilberries, the latter seeming so much darker in the basket than on their stalks! Among the birches there was an old acquaintance, with a double trunk, a birch-lyre, and beside it an old post with a board on it; nothing could be made out on it except bullet marks; a Browning had once been fired at it by his English tutor—also Browning—and then Father had taken the pistol, swiftly and dexterously ramming bullets into the clip, and knocked out a smooth *K* with seven shots.

Farther on, a bog orchis bloomed unceremoniously in a patch of marshy ground, behind which he had to cross a back road, and off to the right a white wicket gate gleamed: the entrance to the park. Trimmed with ferns outside, luxuriantly lined with jasmine and honeysuckle inside, in places darkened by fir needles, in others lightened by birch leaves, this huge, dense and multipathed park stood poised in an equilibrium of sun and shadow, which formed from night to night a variable, but in its variability a uniquely characteristic harmony. If circles of warm light palpitated underfoot in the avenue, then a thick velvet stripe was sure to stretch across in the distance, behind it again came that tawny sieve, while further, at the bottom, there deepened a rich blackness that, transferred to paper, would satisfy the water colorist only as long as the paint remained wet, so that he would have to put on layer after layer to retain its beauty—which would immediately fade. All paths led to the house, but geometry notwithstanding, it seemed the quickest way was not by the straight avenue, slim and sleek with a sensitive shadow (rising like a blind woman to meet you and touch your face) and with a burst of emerald sunlight at the very end, but by any of its tortuous and unweeded neighbors. He walked along his favorite one toward the still invisible house, past the bench on which according to established tradition his parents used to sit on the eve of his father's regular departures on his travels: Father, knees apart, twirling his spectacles or a carnation in his hands, had his head lowered, with a boater tipped

onto the back of it and with a taciturn almost mocking smile around his puckered eyes and in the soft corners of his mouth, somewhere in the very roots of his trimmed beard, and Mother was telling him something, from the side, from below, from beneath her large, trembling white hat, or was pressing out crunchy little holes in the dumb sand with the tip of her parasol. He walked past a boulder with rowan saplings clambering onto it (one had turned to offer a hand to the younger), past a small grass-grown plat which had been a pond in Grandfather's time and past some shortish fir trees which used to become quite round in winter under their burden of snow: the snow used to fall straight and slow, it could fall like that for three days, five months, nine years—and already, ahead, in a clear space traversed by white specks, one glimpsed a dim yellow blotch approaching, which suddenly came into focus, shuddered, thickened and turned into a tram-car, and the wet snow drifted slantingly, plastering over the left face of a pillar of glass, the tram stop, while the asphalt remained black and bare, as if incapable by nature of accepting anything white, and among the signs over chemists' shops, stationers' and grocers', which swam before the eyes and, at first, were even incomprehensible, only one could still appear to be written in Russian: Kakao. Meanwhile, around him everything that had just been imagined with such pictorial clarity (which in itself was suspicious, like the vividness of dreams at the wrong time of day or after a soporific) paled, corroded, disintegrated, and if one looked around, then (as in a fairy tale the stairs disappear behind the back of whoever is mounting them) everything collapsed and disappeared, a farewell configuration of trees, standing like people come to see someone off and already swept away, a scrap of rainbow faded in the wash, the path, of which there remained only the gesture of a turn, a butterfly on a pin with only three wings and no abdomen, a carnation in the sand, by the shade of the bench, the very last most persistent odds and ends, and in another moment all this yielded Fyodor

without a struggle to his present, and straight out of his reminiscence (swift and senseless, visiting him like an attack of a fatal illness at any hour, in any place), straight from the hothouse paradise of the past, he stepped onto a Berlin tramcar

He was going to a lesson, was late as usual, and as usual there grew in him a vague, evil, heavy hatred for the clumsy sluggishness of this least gifted of all methods of transport, for the hopelessly familiar, hopelessly ugly streets going by the wet window, and most of all for the feet, sides and necks of the native passengers. His reason knew that they could also include genuine, completely human individuals with unselfish passions, pure sorrows, even with memories shining through life, but for some reason he got the impression that all these cold, slippery eyes, looking at him as if he were carrying an illegal treasure (which his gift was, essentially), belonged only to malicious hags and crooked hucksters. The Russian conviction that the German is in small numbers vulgar and in large numbers—unbearably vulgar was, he knew, a conviction unworthy of an artist; but nonetheless he was seized with a trembling, and only the gloomy conductor with hunted eyes and a plaster on his finger, eternally and painfully seeking equilibrium and room to pass amidst the convulsive jolts of the car and the cattle-like crowding of standing passengers, seemed outwardly, if not a human being, then at least a poor relation to a human being. At the second stop a lean man in a short coat with a fox-fur collar, wearing a green hat and frayed spats, sat down in front of Fyodor. In settling down he bumped him with his knee and with the corner of a fat briefcase with a leather handle, and this trivial thing turned his irritation into a kind of pure fury, so that, staring fixedly at the sitter, reading his features, he instantly concentrated on him all his sinful hatred (for this poor, pitiful, expiring nation) and knew precisely why he hated him: for that low forehead, for those pale eyes; for *Vollmilch* and *Extrastark*, implying the lawful existence of the diluted and the artificial, for the Punchinello-like system of gestures

(threatening children not as we do—with an upright finger, a standing reminder of Divine Judgment—but with a horizontal digit imitating a waving stick); for a love of fences, rows, mediocrity; for the cult of the office; for the fact that if you listen to his inner voice (or to any conversation on the street) you will inevitably hear figures, money; for the lavatory humor and crude laughter; for the fatness of the backsides of both sexes, even if the rest of the subject is not fat, for the lack of fastidiousness; for the visibility of cleanliness—the gleam of saucepan bottoms in the kitchen and the barbaric filth of the bathrooms; for the weakness for dirty little tricks, for taking pains with dirty tricks, for the abominable object stuck carefully on the railings of the public gardens; for someone else's live cat, pierced through with wire as revenge on a neighbor, and the wire cleverly twisted at one end; for cruelty in everything, self-satisfied, taken for granted; for the unexpected, rapturous helpfulness with which five passersby help you to pick up some dropped farthings; for. . . . Thus he threaded the points of his biased indictment, looking at the man who sat opposite him—until the latter took a copy of Vasiliev's newspaper from his pocket and coughed unconcernedly with a Russian intonation.

That's wonderful, thought Fyodor, almost smiling with delight. How clever, how gracefully sly and how essentially good life is! Now he made out in the newspaper reader's features such a compatriotic softness—in the corners of the eyes, large nostrils, a Russian-cut mustache—that it became at once both funny and incomprehensible how anyone could have been deceived His thoughts were cheered by this unexpected respite and had already taken a different turn The pupil he was visiting was a scantily educated but inquisitive old Jew who the previous year had conceived a sudden desire to learn how to "chat in French," which seemed to the old man both more attainable and more becoming to his years, character, and experience of life than the dry study of the grammar of a language. Invariably at the beginning of the lesson, groaning and mixing a multi-

tude of Russian and German words with a pinch of French, he described his exhaustion after the day's work (he was manager of a sizable paper factory), and went from these lengthy complaints to a discussion—in French!—landing immediately up to the ears in hopeless darkness, of international politics, and with this demanded miracles: that all this wild, viscous and ponderous stuff, comparable to the transportation of stones over a washed-out road, should turn suddenly into filigreed speech. Entirely lacking in the ability to remember words (and liking to talk of this not as a shortcoming but as an interesting characteristic of his nature), he not only made no progress but even managed in a year of studying to forget those few French phrases with which Fyodor had found him, and on the basis of which the old man had thought to construct in three or four evenings his own animated, light, portable Paris. Alas, the time passed fruitlessly, proving the futility of the effort and the impossibility of the dream—and then the instructor turned out to be inexperienced, completely lost when the unfortunate factory manager suddenly needed exact information (what's "dandy roll" in French?) which, out of delicacy, the questioner immediately renounced, and both were momentarily embarrassed, like an innocent youth and maiden in some old idyll who inadvertently touch one another. It gradually became unendurable. Since the pupil referred more and more despondently to the tiredness of his brain and more and more often postponed the lessons (his secretary's heavenly voice on the telephone was the melody of happiness!), it seemed to Fyodor that the latter had finally become convinced of his teacher's ineptitude, but that he was prolonging the mutual torment out of pity for his worn trousers, and would continue to do so to the grave.

And now, sitting in the tramcar, he saw with ineffable vividness how in seven or eight minutes he would enter the familiar study, furnished in Berliner animal luxury, would settle in the deep leather armchair beside the low, metal table with its glass cigarette box opened for him, and its

lamp fashioned like a terrestrial globe, would light a cigarette, cross his legs with cheap gaiety and come face to face with the agonized, submissive gaze of his hopeless pupil, would hear so clearly his sigh and the ineradicable *"Nu, vout"* with which he interlarded his answers; but suddenly the unpleasant feeling of lateness was replaced in Fyodor's soul by a distinct and somehow outrageously joyful decision not to appear at all for the lesson—to get off at the next stop and return home to his half-read book, to his unworldly cares, to the blissful mist in which his real life floated, to the complex, happy, devout work which had occupied him for about a year already. He knew that today he would receive payment for several lessons, knew that otherwise he would have to smoke and eat again on credit, but he was quite reconciled to this for the sake of that energetic idleness (everything is here, in this combination), for the sake of the lofty truancy he was allowing himself. And he was allowing it not for the first time. Shy and exacting, living always uphill, spending all his strength in pursuit of the innumerable beings that flashed inside him, as if at dawn in a mythological grove, he could no longer force himself to mix with people either for money or for pleasure, and therefore he was poor and solitary. And, as if to spite common fate, it was pleasant to recall how once in the summer he had not gone to a party in a "suburban villa" solely because the Chernyshevskis had warned him that a man would be there who "perhaps could help him"; or how the previous autumn he had not found time to communicate with a divorce bureau which needed a translator—because he was composing a verse drama, because the lawyer promising him this income was importunate and stupid, because, finally, he put it off too long and then was unable to make up his mind.

He worked his way out onto the car's platform. Just then the wind searched him cruelly after which Fyodor drew the belt of his mackintosh tighter and adjusted his scarf, but the small amount of tram warmth had already been taken away from him. The snow had ceased falling, but where it went

no one knew; there remained only a ubiquitous dampness which was evidenced both in the swishing sound of motor tires and in the piglike sharpness of the ear-torturing, ragged squeal of car horns, and in the darkness of the day, shivering with cold, with sadness, with loathing for itself, and in the particular shade of yellow of the already lighted shop windows, in the reflections and refractions, in the liquid lights, in all this sick irretention of electric light. The tram came out on the square and, braking excruciatingly, stopped, but it was only a preliminary stop, because in front, by the stone island crowded with people standing by to board, two other trams had got stuck, both with cars coupled on, and this inert agglomeration was also evidence somehow of the disastrous imperfection of the world in which Fyodor still continued to reside. He could stand it no longer, he jumped out and strode across the slippery square to another tramline on which, by cheating, he could return to his own district on the same ticket—good for one transfer but not at all for a return journey; but the honest, official calculation that a passenger would travel in one direction only was undermined in certain cases by the fact that, knowing the routes, one could turn a straight journey imperceptibly into an arc, bending back to the point of departure. This clever system (pleasant evidence of a certain purely German flaw in the planning of tram routes) was willingly followed by Fyodor; from absentmindedness however, from an incapacity to cherish a material advantage for any length of time, and already thinking of something else, he paid automatically for the new ticket he had intended to save on. And even then the cheat prospered, even then not he but the city transport department proved to be out of pocket, and furthermore for a much, much greater sum (the price of a Nord Express ticket!) than could have been expected: crossing the square and turning into a side street, he walked toward the tram stop through a small, at first glance, thicket of fir trees, gathered here for sale on account of the approach of Christmas; they formed between them a kind of small avenue; swinging his arms as

he walked he brushed his fingertips against the wet needles; but soon the tiny avenue broadened out, the sun burst forth and he emerged onto a garden terrace where on the soft red sand one could make out the sigla of a summer day: the imprints of a dog's paws, the beaded tracks of a wagtail, the Dunlop stripe left by Tanya's bicycle, dividing into two waves at the turn, and a heel dent where with a light, mute movement containing perhaps a quarter of a pirouette she had slid off it to one side and started walking, keeping hold of the handlebars. An old wooden house in the so-called "abietineous" style, painted a pale green, with like-colored drainpipes, carved designs under the roof and a high stone foundation (where in the gray putty one could fancy one saw the round pink cruppers of walled-up horses), a large, sturdy and extraordinarily expressive house, with balconies on a level with the lime branches, and verandas decorated with precious glass, sailed forward to meet him in a cloud of swallows, with a full spread of awnings, its lightning conductor cleaving through the blue sky and the bright white clouds extending an endless embrace. Sitting on the stone steps of the foremost veranda, illuminated squarely by the sun, are: Father, obviously just back from a swim, turbaned in a shaggy towel so that one cannot see—and how one would like to!—his dark crop, streaked with gray and tapering to a peak on his forehead; Mother, all in white, staring straight in front of her and somehow so youthfully hugging her knees; next to her—Tanya, in an ample blouse, the end of her black braid lying on her collarbone, her smooth parting lowered, holding in her arms a fox terrier whose mouth is creased in a wide smile from the heat; higher up—Yvonna Ivanovna, who for some reason has not come out, her features blurred but her slim waist, her belt and her watch chain clearly visible; to one side, lower down, reclining and resting his head in the lap of the round-faced girl (velvet neck-ribbon, silk bows) who gave Tanya music lessons, his father's brother, a stout army doctor, a joker and a very handsome man; lower still, two sour little glowering schoolboys, Fyodor's cousins: one in a

school cap, the other without—the one without to be killed seven years later in the battle of Melitopol; at the very bottom, on the sand, in exactly the same pose as his mother—Fyodor himself, as he was then, though he had changed little since that time, white teeth, black brows, short hair, wearing an open shirt. One forgot who had taken it, but this transient, faded and generally insignificant (how many others and better were there) photograph, unsuitable even for copying, had alone been saved by a miracle and had become priceless, reaching Paris among his mother's belongings and brought by her to Berlin last Christmas; for now, choosing her son a present, she was guided not by what was most costly to get but by what was most difficult to part with.

She had come to him for two weeks, after a three-year separation, and in the first moment when, powdered to a deathly pallor, wearing black gloves and black stockings and an old sealskin coat thrown open, she had descended the iron steps of the coach, glancing with equal quickness first at him and then at what was underfoot, and the next moment, her face twisted with the pain of happiness, was clinging to him, blissfully moaning, kissing him anywhere—ear, neck—it had seemed to him that the beauty of which he had been so proud had faded, but as his vision adjusted itself to the twilight of the present, so different at first from the distantly receding light of memory, he again recognized in her everything that he had loved: the pure outline of her face, narrowing down to the chin, the changeful play of those green, brown, yellow, entrancing eyes under their velvet brows, the long, light stance, the avidity with which she lit a cigarette in the taxi, the attention with which she suddenly looked—unblinded, therefore, by the excitement of the meeting, as any other would have been—at the grotesque scene noticed by both of them: an imperturbable motorcyclist carrying a bust of Wagner in his sidecar; and already by the time they were coming up to the house the light of the past had overtaken the present, had soaked it to saturation point, and everything became the same as it had

appeared to him in dreams, as if just returned from some monstrous penal servitude, having experienced physical tortures which it was forbidden to mention, now changed into clean linen—it was impossible to think of the body underneath—and with a completely uncharacteristic expression of unpleasant, momentous sullenness, with a sweaty brow and slightly bared teeth, sitting at table in the circle of his hushed family. But when, overcoming his sensation of the spuriousness of the very style foisted on fate, he nevertheless forced himself to imagine the arrival of a live father, aged but undoubtedly his, and the most complete, most convincing possible explanation of his silent absence, he was seized, not by happiness, but by a sickening terror—which, however, immediately disappeared and yielded to a feeling of satisfied harmony when he removed this meeting beyond the boundary of earthly life.

But on the other hand. . . . It happens that over a long period you are promised a great success, in which from the very start you do not believe, so dissimilar is it from the rest of fate's offerings, and if from time to time you do think of it, then you do so as it were to indulge your fantasy—but when, at last, on a very ordinary day with a west wind blowing, the news comes—simply, instantaneously and decisively destroying any hope in it—then you are suddenly amazed to find that although you did not believe in it, you had been living with it all this time, not realizing the constant, close presence of the dream, which had long since grown fat and independent, so that now you cannot get it out of your life without making a hole in that life. Thus had Fyodor, in spite of all logic and not daring to envision its realization, lived with the familiar dream of his father's return, a dream which had mysteriously embellished his life and somehow lifted it above the level of surrounding lives, so that he could see all sorts of distant and interesting things, just as, when a little boy, his father used to lift him by his elbows thus enabling him to see what was interesting over a fence.

After the first evening, when she had renewed her hope

and become convinced that the same hope was alive in her son, Elizaveta Pavlovna no longer referred to it in words, but as usual, it was taken for granted in all their conversations, especially since they did not converse much aloud: frequently, after several minutes of animated silence, Fyodor would suddenly notice that the whole time they both knew very well what it was about, this double, almost subgramineal speech which emerged as a single stream, as a word understood to both of them. And sometimes they would play like this: sitting side by side and silently imagining to themselves that each was taking the same Leshino walk, they went out of the park, took the path along the field (there was a river to the left behind the alders), across the shady graveyard where sun-flecked crosses were measuring something terribly large with their arms and where it was somehow awkward to pick the raspberries, across the river, upwards again, through the wood, to another bend of the river, to the Pont des Vaches and farther, through the pines and along the Chemin du Pendu —familiar nicknames, not grating to their Russian ears but thought up when their grandfathers had been children And suddenly, in the middle of this silent walk being performed by two minds, using according to the rules of the game the rate of a human footstep (although they could have flown over their whole domains in a single instant), both stopped and said where they had got to, and when it turned out, as it often did, that neither one had outpaced the other, having halted in the same coppice, the same smile flashed upon mother and son and shone through their common tear.

Very soon they again got into their inner rhythm of intercourse, for there was little new that they did not know already from letters. She told him in great detail about the recent wedding of Tanya, who had now gone off to Belgium until January with a husband still unknown to Fyodor, an agreeable, quiet, very polite and completely unremarkable gentleman "working in the field of radio"; and that when they returned she would move into a new flat with them in an enormous house near one of the Paris

gates: she was glad to be leaving the small hotel with the steep dark staircase, where she had been living with Tanya in a tiny but many-cornered room completely swallowed up by a mirror and visited by bedbugs of various caliber—from transparent pink baby ones to leathery brown fatties—which congregated first behind the wall calendar with a Russian landscape by Levitan on it and then closer to the field of action, in the inside pocket of the torn wallpaper, directly above the double bed; but the pleasant prospect of a new home was not unmixed with dread: she had an antipathy to her son-in-law and there was something forced in Tanya's brisk, showy happiness—"You see, he's not quite our set," she confessed, stressing this with a certain tightening of the jaws and a downward look; but that was not all, and anyway Fyodor had already heard about that other man whom Tanya loved but who did not love her.

They went out quite often; as always Elizaveta Pavlovna seemed to be looking for something, rapidly spanning the world with a skimming glance of her shimmery eyes. The German holiday proved wet, puddles made the sidewalks seem full of holes, the Christmas tree lights burned dully in the windows, and here and there at street corners a commercial Santa Claus in a red stormcoat and with hungry eyes was distributing handbills. In the windows of a department store some villain had had the idea of setting up dummy skiers on artificial snow beneath the Star of Bethlehem. Once, they saw a modest Communist procession walking through the slush—with wet flags—most of the marchers battered by life, some crookbacked, others lame or sickly, a lot of plain-looking women and several sedate petty-bourgeois. Fyodor and his mother went to have a look at the apartment house where the three of them had lived for two years, but the janitor had already changed, the former proprietor had died, strange curtains hung in the familiar windows, and somehow there was nothing their hearts could recognize. They visited a cinema where a Russian film was being shown which conveyed with particular *brio* the globules of sweat rolling down the glistening

resembling furniture and taking the visitors he passed for paranoiacs, troubled Fyodor kept pondering over the fact that the misfortune of the Chernyshevskis appeared to be a kind of mocking variation on the theme of his own hope-suffused grief, and only much later did he understand the full refinement of the corollary and all the irreproachable compositional balance with which these collateral sounds had been included in his own life.

Three days before his mother's departure, in a large hall which was well known to Berlin Russians and which belonged to a society of dentists, judging by the portraits of venerable tooth doctors that looked down from the walls, an open literary evening was held in which Fyodor Konstantinovich also took part. Few people had turned up and it was cold; by the doors the same a thousand times seen representatives of the local Russian intelligentsia stood around smoking, and as usual, catching sight of some familiar, friendly face, Fyodor hurried toward it with sincere pleasure, only to have it replaced by boredom after the first burst of conversation Elizaveta Pavlovna was joined in the first row by Mme. Chernyshevski, and from the fact that his mother occasionally turned her head this way and that while adjusting her hairdo from behind, Fyodor, hovering about the hall, concluded that she was little interested in the society of her neighbor. At last the program began. First to read was a name writer who in his time had appeared in all the Russian reviews, a gray-haired, clean-shaven old man rather resembling a hoopoe, with eyes which were too good-natured for literature; in a sensibly everyday kind of voice he read a tale of Petersburg life on the eve of the revolution, with an ether-sniffing vamp, chic spies, champagne, Rasputin and apocalyptically apoplectic sunsets over the Neva. After him a certain Kron, writing under the pseudonym of Rostislav Strannyy (Rostislav the Strange), gladdened us with a long story about a romantic adventure in the town of a hundred eyes, beneath skies unknown, for the sake of beauty his epithets were placed

after the nouns, his verbs had also flown off somewhere or other and for some reason the word *storozhko*, "warily," was repeated about a dozen times. ("She warily let fall a smile"; "The chestnuts broke warily into blossom.") After the interval poets came thick and fast: a tall youth with a buttonlike face, another, shortish but with a large nose, an elderly lady wearing pince-nez, another, younger, one—and finally Koncheyev, who, in contrast to the triumphant precision and polish of the others, muttered his verses in a low tired voice, but there dwelt independently in them such music, in the seemingly dark verse such a chasm of meaning yawned at one's feet, so convincing were the sounds and so unexpectedly, out of the very same words every poet was stringing together, there sprang up, played, and slipped away without ever quenching one's thirst a unique perfection, bearing no resemblance to words and in no need of words, that for the first time that evening the applause was not feigned. Last to appear was Godunov-Cherdyntsev. From the poems written during the summer he read those which Elizaveta Pavlovna liked so much—on Russia:

> The yellow birches, mute in the blue sky .

and on Berlin, beginning with the stanza:

> Things here are in a sorry state;
> Even the moon is much too rough
> Though it is rumored to come straight
> From Hamburg where they make the stuff . . .

and the one which moved her most of all, although she did not think to connect it with the memory of a young woman, long dead, whom Fyodor had loved when sixteen:

> One night between sunset and river
> On the old bridge we stood, you and I.
> Will you ever forget it, I queried,
> —That particular swift that went by?
> And you answered, so earnestly: Never!

And what sobs made us suddenly shiver,
What a cry life emitted in flight!
Till we die, till tomorrow, for ever,
You and I on the old bridge one night.

But it was getting late, many people were moving toward the exit, one lady was putting on her coat with her back to the platform, the applause was sparse. . . . The damp night gleamed black on the street, with a raging wind: never, never will we reach home. But nonetheless a tram came, and hanging on a strap in the gangway over his mother sitting by the window, Fyodor thought with heavy revulsion of the verses he had written that day, of word-fissures, of the leakage of poetry, and at the same time, with proud, joyous energy, with passionate impatience, he was already looking for the creation of something new, something still unknown, genuine, corresponding fully to the gift which he felt like a burden inside himself.

On the eve of her departure they both sat up late in his room, she, in the armchair, easily and skillfully (whereas formerly she could not sew a button on) darning and mending his pitiful things, while he, on the sofa, biting his nails, was reading a thick battered book; earlier, in his youth, he had skipped some of the pages—"Angelo," "Journey to Arzrum"—but lately it was precisely in these that he had found particular pleasure. He had only just got to the words: "The frontier held something mysterious for me; to travel had been my favorite dream since childhood," when suddenly he felt a sweet, strong stab from somewhere Still not understanding, he put the book to one side and slipped blind fingers into a boxful of homemade cigarettes At that moment his mother said without raising her head: "What did I just remember! Those funny rhymes about butterflies and moths which you and he composed together when we were out walking, you remember. 'Your blue stripe, Catocalid, shows from under its gray lid' " "Yes," replied Fyodor, "some were downright epics: 'A dead leaf is not hoarier than a newborn *arborea*.' " (What a

surprise it had been! Father had only just brought back the very first specimen from his travels, having found it during the initial trek through Siberia—he had not even had time to describe it yet—and on the first day after his return, in the Leshino park, two paces from the house, with no thought of lepidoptera, while strolling with his wife and children, throwing a tennis ball for the fox terriers, basking in his return, in the balmy weather and the health and gaiety of his family, but unconsciously noting with the experienced eye of a hunter every insect along his path, he had suddenly pointed out to Fyodor with the tip of his cane a plump reddish-gray *Epicnaptera* moth, with sinuate margins, of the leaf-mimicking kind, hanging asleep from a stalk under a bush; he had been about to walk on (the members of this genus look very much alike) but then squatted down, wrinkled his forehead, inspected his find and suddenly said in a bright voice: *"Well, I'm damned!* I need not have gone so far!" "I always said so," interposed his wife with a laugh. The furry little monster in his hand belonged to the new species he had just brought back—and now it had cropped up here, in the Province of St. Petersburg, whose fauna had been so well investigated! But, as often happens, the momentum of mighty coincidence did not stop there, it was good for one more stage: only a few days later his father learned that this new moth had just been described from St Petersburg specimens by a fellow scientist, and Fyodor cried all night long. they had beaten Father to it!

And now Elizaveta Pavlovna was about to return to Paris. They stood for a long time on the narrow platform waiting for the train, next to the luggage elevator, while on the other lines the sad city trains stopped for a moment, hastily banging their doors. The Paris express rushed in. His mother boarded and immediately thrust her head through the window, smiling. By the neighboring opulent sleeping car, seeing off an unpretentious old lady, stood a couple: a pale, red-lipped beauty in a black silk coat with a high fur collar, and a famous stunt flyer; everyone was

staring at him, at his muffler, at his back, as if expecting to find wings on it

"I have a suggestion to make," said his mother gaily as they parted. "I have about seventy marks left which are quite useless to me, and you must eat better. I can't look at you, you're so thin. Here, take them." *"Avec joie,"* he replied, instantly envisioning a year's pass to the state library, milk chocolate and some mercenary young German girl whom, in his baser moments, he kept planning to get for himself.

Pensive, abstracted, vaguely tormented by the thought that somehow in his talks with his mother he had left the main thing untold, Fyodor returned home, took off his shoes, broke off the corner of a chocolate bar together with its silver paper, moved the book left open on the sofa closer. . . . "The harvest rippled, awaiting the sickle." Again that divine stab! And how it called, how it *prompted* him, the sentence about the Terek ("In faith, the river was awesome!") or—even more fitly, more intimately—about the Tartar women: "They were sitting on horseback, swathed in yashmaks: all one could see were their eyes and the heels of their shoes."

Thus did he hearken to the purest sound from Pushkin's tuning fork—and he already knew exactly what this sound required of him. Two weeks after his mother's departure he wrote her about what he had conceived, what he had been helped to conceive by the transparent rhythm of "Arzrum," and she replied as if she had already known about it:

It is a long time since I have been as happy as I was with you in Berlin, but watch out, this is no easy undertaking. I feel in my heart that you will accomplish it wonderfully, but remember that you need a great deal of exact information and very little family sentimentality. If you need anything I'll tell you all I can, but take care of the special research where you are, and this is most important, take all his books and those of Grigoriy Efimovich, and those of the Grand Duke, and lots more; of course you know how to obtain all this, and be sure to get into touch with Vasiliy

Germanovich Krüger, search him out if he's still in Berlin, they once traveled together, I remember, and approach other people, you know whom better than I, write to Avinov, to Verity, write to that German who used to visit us before the war, Benhaas? Banhaas? Write to Stuttgart, to London, to Tring, in Oxford, everywhere, *débrouille-toi* because I know nothing of these matters and all these names merely sing in my ears, but how certain I am that you will manage, my darling.

He continued, however, to wait—the planned work was a wafture of bliss, and he was afraid to spoil that bliss by haste and moreover the complex responsibility of the work frightened him, he was not ready for it yet. Continuing his training program during the whole of spring, he fed on Pushkin, inhaled Pushkin (the reader of Pushkin has the capacity of his lungs enlarged). He studied the accuracy of the words and the absolute purity of their conjunction; he carried the transparency of prose to the limits of blank verse and then mastered it: in this he was served by a living example in the prose of Pushkin's *History of the Pugachyov Rebellion:*

> God help us not to see a Russian riot
> Senseless and merciless . . .

To strengthen the muscles of his muse he took on his rambles whole pages of *Pugachyov* learned by heart as a man using an iron bar instead of a walking stick. Toward him out of a Pushkin tale came Karolina Schmidt, "a girl heavily rouged, of meek and modest appearance," who acquired the bed in which Schoning died Beyond Grunewald forest a postmaster who resembled Simeon Vyrin (from another tale) was lighting his pipe by the window, and there also stood pots with balsam flowers. The sky-blue *sarafan* of the Damsel turned Peasant could be glimpsed among the alder bushes. He was in that state of feeling and mind "when reality, giving way to fancies, blends with them in the nebulous visions of first sleep."

Pushkin entered his blood. With Pushkin's voice merged the voice of his father. He kissed Pushkin's hot little hand, taking it for another, large hand smelling of the breakfast *kalach* (a blond roll). He remembered that his and Tanya's nurse hailed from the same place that Pushkin's Arina came from—namely Suyda, just beyond Gatchina: this had been within an hour's ride of their area beyond Gatchina: this had been within an hour's ride of their area—and she had also spoken "singsong like." He heard his father on a fresh summer morning as they walked down to the river bathhouse, on whose plank wall shimmered the golden reflection of the water, repeating with classic fervor what he considered to be the most beautiful not only of Pushkin's lines but of all the verses ever written in the world: *"Tut Apollon-ideal, tam Niobeya-pechal'"* (Here is Apollo-ideal, there is Niobe-grief) and the russet wing and mother-of-pearl of a Niobe fritillary flashed over the scabiosas of the riverside meadow, where, during the first days of June, there occurred sparsely the small Black Apollo.

Indefatigably, in ecstasy, he was really preparing his work now (in Berlin with an adjustment of thirteen days it was also the first days of June), collected material, read until dawn, studied maps, wrote letters and met with the necessary people. From Pushkin's prose he had passed to his life, so that in the beginning the rhythm of Pushkin's era commingled with the rhythm of his father's life. Scientific books (with the Berlin Library's stamp always on the ninety-ninth page), such as the familiar volumes of *The Travels of a Naturalist* in unfamiliar black and green bindings, lay side by side with the old Russian journals in which he sought Pushkin's reflected light. There, one day, he stumbled over the remarkable *Memoirs of the Past* of A. N. Suhoshchokov, in which there were among other things two or three pages concerning his grandfather, Kirill Ilyich (his father had once referred to them—with displeasure), and the fact that the writer of these memoirs mentioned him incidentally in connection with his thoughts on Pushkin now seemed somehow to have particular significance, even

though he portrayed Kirill Ilyich as a gay dog and a good-for-nothing

Suhoshchokov wrote:

They say that a man whose leg is cut off at the hip can feel it for a long time, moving nonexistent toes and flexing nonexistent muscles. Thus will Russia long continue to feel the living presence of Pushkin. There is something seductive, like an abyss, in his fatal destiny, and indeed, he himself felt that he had had, and would have, a special reckoning with fate. In addition to the poet's extracting poetry out of his past, he also found it in tragic thoughts about the future. The triple formula of human existence: irrevocability, unrealizability, inevitability—was well known to him. But how he wanted to live! In the above-mentioned album of my "academic" aunt he personally wrote a poem which I can remember to this day, both mentally and visually, so that I can even see its position on the page:

> Oh no, my life has not grown tedious,
> I want it still, I love it still.
> My soul, although its youth has vanished,
> Has not become completely chill.
> Fate will yet comfort me; a novel
> Of genius I shall yet enjoy,
> I'll see yet a mature Mickiéwicz,
> With something I myself may toy.

I do not think one could find any other poet who peered so often—now in jest, now superstitiously, or with inspired seriousness—into the future Right to this day there lives in the Province of Kursk, topping the hundred mark, an old man whom I remember as being already elderly, stupid and malicious—but Pushkin is no longer with us. Meeting in the course of my long life with remarkable talents and living through remarkable events, I have often meditated on how he would have reacted to this and that: why, he could have seen the emancipation of the serfs and could have read *Anna Karenin!* . . . Returning now to these

reveries of mine I recall that once in my youth I had something in the nature of a vision. This psychological episode is closely linked with the recollection of a personage still thriving to this very day, whom I shall call Ch.—I trust he will not blame me for this revival of a distant past. We were acquainted through our families—my grandfather had once been friendly with his father. In 1836, while abroad, this Ch. who was then quite young—barely seventeen—quarreled with his family (and in so doing hastened, so they say, the decease of his sire, a hero of the Napoleonic War), and in the company of some Hamburg merchants sailed nonchalantly off to Boston, from there landing in Texas where he successfully took up cattle breeding. In that manner twenty years passed. The fortune he had made he lost playing écarté on a Mississippi keel-boat, won it back in the gaming houses of New Orleans, blued it all over again, and after one of those scandalously prolonged, noisy, smoky duels on closed premises which were then fashionable in Louisiana—and after many other adventures—he became homesick for Russia where, conveniently, a demesne was awaiting him, and with the same carefree easiness with which he had left it, he returned to Europe. Once, on a winter's day in 1858, he visited us unexpectedly at our house on the Moyka, in St. Petersburg: Father was away and the guest was received by us youngsters. As we looked at this outlandish fop in his soft black hat and black clothes, the romantic gloom of which caused his silk shirt with its sumptuous pleats, and his blue, lilac and pink waistcoat with diamond buttons to stand out particularly dazzlingly, my brother and I could hardly contain our laughter and decided there and then to take advantage of the fact that during all these years he had heard absolutely nothing of his homeland, as if it had fallen through some trap door, so that now, like a forty-year-old Rip van Winkle waking up in a transformed St Petersburg, Ch. was hungry for any news, the which we undertook to give him plenty of, mixed with our outrageous fabrications. To the question, for instance, was Pushkin alive and what was he writing, I blas-

phemously replied, "Why, he came out with a new poem the other day." That night we took our guest to the theater. It did not turn out too well, however. Instead of treating him to a new Russian comedy we showed him *Othello* with the famous black tragedian Aldridge. At first our American planter seemed to be highly amused by the appearance of a genuine Negro on the stage. But he remained indifferent to the marvelous power of his acting and was more taken up with examining the audience, especially our St. Petersburg ladies (one of whom he soon afterwards married), who were devoured at that moment with envy for Desdemona.

"Look who's sitting next to us," my brother suddenly said to Ch. in a low voice, "There, to our right."

In the neighboring box there sat an old man. . . . Of shortish stature, in a worn tailcoat, with a sallow and swarthy complexion, disheveled ashen side-whiskers, and sparse, gray-streaked tousled hair, he was taking a most eccentric delight in the acting of the African: his thick lips twitched, his nostrils were dilated, and at certain bits he even jumped up and down in his seat and banged with delight on the parapet, his rings flashing.

"Who's that?" asked Ch.

"What, don't you recognize him? Look closer."

"I don't recognize him."

Then my brother made big eyes and whispered, "Why, that's Pushkin!"

Ch. looked again . . . and after a minute became interested by something else. It seems funny now to recall what a strange mood came upon me then: the prank, as happens from time to time, rebounded, and this frivolously summoned ghost did not want to disappear: I was quite incapable of tearing myself away from the neighboring box; I looked at those harsh wrinkles, that broad nose, those large ears . . . shivers ran down my back, and not all of Othello's jealousy was able to drag me away. What if this is indeed Pushkin, I mused, Pushkin at sixty, Pushkin spared two decades ago by the bullet of the fatal coxcomb, Pushkin in the rich autumn of his genius. . . . This

is he; this yellow hand grasping those lady's opera glasses wrote *Anchar, Graf Nulin, The Egyptian Nights. . . .* The act finished; applause thundered. Gray-haired Pushkin stood up abruptly, and still smiling, with a bright sparkle in his youthful eyes, quickly left his box.

Suhoshchokov errs in depicting my grandfather as an empty-headed rake. It was simply that the latter's interests were situated on a different plane from the intellectual habitus of a young dilettante, member of the St. Petersburg literary set which our memoirist was then. Even if Kirill Ilyich had been pretty wild in his youth, once married he not only settled down but also entered government service, simultaneously doubling his inherited fortune by successful operations and later retiring to his country place, where he manifested extraordinary skill in farming, produced a new sort of apple on the side, left a curious "Discours" (the fruit of winter leisure) on the "Equality Before the Law in the Animal Kingdom" plus a proposal for a clever reform under the kind of intricate title that was fashionable then, "Visions of an Egyptian Bureaucrat," and as an old man accepted an important consular post, in London. He was kind, brave and truthful, and had his quirks and passions —what more could be needed? A tradition has subsisted in the family that, having sworn not to game, he was physically incapable of remaining in a room where there was a pack of cards An ancient Colt revolver that had served him well and a medallion with the portrait of a mysterious lady attracted indescribably my boyhood dreams His life, which had retained to the end the freshness of its stormy beginning, ended peacefully. He returned to Russia in 1883, no longer a Louisiana duelist but a Russian dignitary, and on a July day, on the leather sofa in the little blue corner room where I later kept my collection of butterflies, he expired without suffering, talking all the while in his deathbed delirium about a big river and the music and lights.

My father was born in 1860. A love of lepidoptera was inculcated into him by his German tutor. (By the way:

what has happened to those originals who used to teach natural history to Russian children—green net, tin box on a sling, hat stuck with pinned butterflies, long, learned nose, candid eyes behind spectacles—where are they all, where are their frail skeletons—or was this a special breed of Germans, for export to Russia, or am I not looking properly?) After completing early (in 1876) his schooling in St. Petersburg, he received his university education in England, at Cambridge, where he studied biology under Professor Bright. His first journey, around the world, he made while my grandfather was still alive, and from then until 1918 his whole life consisted of traveling and the writing of scientific works. The main ones among them are: *Lepidoptera Asiatica* (8 volumes published in parts from 1890 to 1917), *The Butterflies and Moths of the Russian Empire* (the first four out of six proposed volumes came out 1912-1916) and, best known to the general public, *The Travels of a Naturalist* (7 volumes 1892-1912). These works were unanimously recognized as classics and he was still a young man when his name occupied one of the first places in the study of the Russo-Asiatic fauna, side by side with the names of its pioneers, Fischer von Waldheim, Menetriés, Eversmann.

He worked in close touch with his remarkable Russian contemporaries. Kholodkovski calls him "the conquistador of Russian entomology." He collaborated with Charles Oberthur, Grand Duke Nikolai Mihailovich, Leech and Seitz. Scattered throughout entomological journals are hundreds of his papers, of which the first—"On the peculiarities of the occurrence of certain butterflies in the Province of St. Petersburg" (Horae Soc Ent. Ross)—is dated 1877, and the last—"*Austautia simonoides* n. sp., a Geometrid Moth Mimicking a Small Parnassius" (Trans. Ent. Soc. London)—is dated 1916. He conducted a weighty and acrimonious polemic with Staudinger, author of the notorious *Katalog*. He was vice-president of the Russian Entomological Society, Full Member of the Moscow Soc. of Investigators of Nature, Member of the Imperial Rus-

sian Geographical Soc , and Honorary Member of a multitude of learned societies abroad.

Between 1885 and 1918 he covered an incredible amount of territory, making surveys of his route on a three-mile scale for a distance of many thousands of miles and forming astounding collections. During these years he completed eight major expeditions which in all lasted eighteen years, but between them there was also a multitude of minor journeys, "diversions" as he called them, considering as part of these minutiae not only his trips to the less-well-investigated countries of Europe but also the journey around the world he had made in his youth. Tackling Asia in earnest he investigated Eastern Siberia, Altai, Fergana, the Pamirs, Western China, "the islands of the Gobi Sea and its coasts," Mongolia, and "the incorrigible continent" of Tibet—and described his travels in precise, weighty words.

Such is the general scheme of my father's life, copied out of an encyclopedia It still does not sing, but I can already hear a living voice within it It remains to be said that in 1898, at thirty-eight years of age, he married Elizaveta Pavlovna Vezhin, the twenty-year-old daughter of a well-known statesman; that he had two children by her; that in the intervals between his journeys. . . .

An agonizing, somehow sacrilegious question, hardly expressible in words: was her life with him happy, together and apart? Shall we disturb this inner world or shall we limit ourselves to a mere description of routes—*arida quaedam viarum descripto?* "Dear Mamma, I now have a great favor to ask of you. Today is the 8th of July, his birthday. On any other day I could never bring myself to ask you. Tell me something about you and him. Not the sort of thing I can find in our shared memories but the sort of thing you alone have gone through and preserved." And here is part of the reply:

. . . imagine—a honeymoon trip, the Pyrenees, the divine bliss of everything, of the sun, the brooks, the flow-

ers, the snowy summits, even the flies in the hotels—and of being every moment together. And then, one morning, I had a headache or something, or the heat was too much for me. He said he would go for a half hour's stroll before lunch. With odd clearness I remember sitting on a hotel balcony (around me peace, the mountains, the wonderful cliffs of Gavarnie) and reading for the first time a book not intended for young girls, *Une Vie* by Maupassant. I remember I liked it very much at the time. I look at my little watch and I see that it is already lunchtime, more than an hour has passed since he left. I wait. At first I am a little cross, then I begin to worry. Lunch is served on the terrace and I am unable to eat. I go out onto the lawn in front of the hotel, I return to my room, I go outside again. In another hour I was in an indescribable state of terror, agitation, God knows what. I was traveling for the first time, I was inexperienced and easily frightened, and then there was *Une Vie*. . . . I decided that he had abandoned me, the most stupid and terrible thoughts kept getting into my head, the day was passing, it seemed to me that the servants were gloating at me—oh, I cannot convey to you what it was like! I had even begun to thrust some dresses into a suitcase in order to return immediately to Russia, and then I suddenly decided he was dead, I ran out and began to babble something crazy and to send for the police. Suddenly I saw him walking across the lawn, his face more cheerful than I had ever seen it before, although he had been cheerful the whole time; there he came, waving his hand to me as if nothing had happened, and his light trousers had wet green spots on them, his panama had gone, his jacket was torn on one side. . . . I expect you have already guessed what had happened. Thank God at least that he finally caught it after all—in his handkerchief, on a sheer cliff—if not he would have spent the night in the mountains, as he coolly explained to me. . . . But now I want to tell you about something else, from a slightly later period, when I already knew what a really good separation could be. You were quite small then, coming up to three,

you can't remember That spring he went off to Tashkent. From there he was due to set off on a journey on the first of June and to be away for not less than two years That was already the second big absence during our time together I often think now that if all the years he spent without me from the day of our wedding were added together they would amount in all to no more than his present absence And I also think of the fact that it sometimes seemed to me then that I was unhappy, but now I know that I was always happy, that that unhappiness was one of the colors of happiness In short, I don't know what came over me that spring, I had always been sort of batty when he went away, but that time I was quite disgracefully so. I suddenly decided that I would catch up with him and travel with him at least till autumn Secretly I gathered a thousand things together; I had absolutely no idea what was needed, but it seemed to me that I was stocking up everything well and properly. I remember binoculars, and an alpenstock, and a camp-bed, and a sun helmet, and a hareskin coat straight out of *The Captain's Daughter,* and a little mother-of-pearl revolver, and some great tarpaulin affair that I was afraid of, and a complicated water bottle that I couldn't unscrew In short, think of the equipment of Tartarin de Tarascon. How I managed to leave you little ones, how I said goodby to you—that's in a kind of mist, and I don't remember any more how I slipped out from Uncle Oleg's surveillance, how I got to the station But I was both frightened and cheerful, I felt myself a heroine, and on the stations everyone looked at my English traveling costume with its short (*entendons-nous*· to the ankle) checked skirt, with the binoculars over one shoulder and a kind of purse over the other That's how I looked when I jumped out of the tarantass in a settlement just outside of Tashkent, when in the brilliant sunlight, I shall never forget it, I caught sight of your father within a hundred yards of the road he was standing with one foot resting on a white stone, one elbow on a fence, and talking to two Cossacks. I ran across the gravel, shouting and laughing; he turned

slowly, and when I suddenly stopped in front of him like a fool, he looked me all over, slit his eyes, and in a horribly unexpected voice spoke three words: "You go home." And I immediately turned, and went back to my carriage, and got in it, and saw he had put his foot in exactly the same place and had again propped his elbow, continuing his conversation with the Cossacks. And now I was driving back, in a trance, petrified, and only somewhere deep within me preparations had started for a storm of tears. But then after a couple of miles [and here a smile broke through the written line] he overtook me, in a cloud of dust, on a white horse, and we parted this time quite differently, so that I resumed my way to St. Petersburg almost as cheerfully as I had left it, only that I kept worrying about you two, wondering how you were, but no matter, you were in good health.

No—somehow it seems to me that I do remember all this, perhaps because it was subsequently often mentioned. In general our whole daily life was permeated with stories about Father, with worry about him, expectations of his return, the hidden sorrow of farewells and the wild joy of welcomings. His passion was reflected in all of us, colored in different ways, apprehended in different ways, but permanent and habitual. His home museum, in which stood rows of oak cabinets with glassed drawers, full of crucified butterflies (the rest—the plants, beetles, birds, rodents and reptiles—he gave to his colleagues to study), where it smelled as it probably smells in Paradise, and where the laboratory assistants worked at tables along the one-piece windows, was a kind of mysterious central hearth, illuminating from inside the whole of our St. Petersburg house—and only the noonday roar of the Petropavlovsk cannon could invade its quiet. Our relatives, non-entomological friends, the servants and the meekly touchy Yvonna Ivanovna talked of butterflies not as of something really existing but as of a certain attribute of my father, which existed only insofar as he existed, or as of an ailment with which

everybody had long since got used to coping, so that with us entomology turned into some sort of routinary hallucination, like a harmless domestic ghost that sits down, no longer surprising anyone, every evening by the fireside. At the same time, none of our countless uncles and aunts took any interest in his science and had hardly even read his popular work, read and reread by dozens of thousands of cultured Russians. Of course Tanya and I had learned to appreciate Father from earliest childhood and he seemed even more enchanting to us than, say, that Harold about whom he told stories to us, Harold who fought with the lions in the Byzantine arena, who pursued brigands in Syria, bathed in the Jordan, took eighty fortresses by storm in Africa, "the Blue Land," saved the Icelanders from starvation—and was famed from Norway to Sicily, from Yorkshire to Novgorod. Then, when I fell under the spell of butterflies, something unfolded in my soul and I relived all my father's journeys, as if I myself had made them: in my dreams I saw the winding road, the caravan, the many-hued mountains, and envied my father madly, agonizingly, to the point of tears—hot and violent tears that would suddenly gush out of me at table as we discussed his letters from the road or even at the simple mention of a far, far place. Every year, with the approach of spring, before moving to the country, I would feel within me a pitiful fraction of what I would have felt before departing for Tibet. On the Nevski Avenue, during the last days of March, when the wooden blocks of the spacious street pavements gleamed dark blue from the damp and the sun, one might see, flying high over the carriages, along the façades of the houses, past the city hall, past the lindens in the square, past the statue of Catherine, the first yellow butterfly. In the classroom the large window was open, sparrows perched on the windowsill and teachers let lessons go by, leaving in their stead squares of blue sky, with footballs falling down out of the blueness. For some reason I always had bad marks in geography and what an expression our geography teacher would have when he used to

mention my father's name, how the inquisitive eyes of my comrades turned on me at this point and how within me the blood rose and fell from suppressed rapture and from fear of expressing that rapture—and now I think of how little I know, how easy it is for me to make some idiotic blunder in describing my father's researches.

At the beginning of April, to open the season, the members of the Russian Entomological Society used to make a traditional trip to the other side of Black River, in a suburb of St. Petersburg, where in a birch grove which was still naked and wet, still showing patches of holey snow, there occurred on the trunks, its feeble transparent wings pressed flat against the papery bark, our favorite rarity, a specialty of the province. Once or twice they took me with them too. Among these elderly family men cautiously, tensely practicing sorcery in an April wood, there was an old theater critic, a gynecologist, a professor of interenational law and a general—for some reason I can recall especially clearly the figure of this general (X. B. Lambovski—there was something Paschal about him), his fat back bending low, with one arm placed behind it, next to the figure of my father, who had sunk on his haunches with a kind of Oriental ease—both were carefully examining in search of pupae a handful of reddish earth dug up with a trowel—and even to this day I am wondering what the coachmen waiting on the road made of all this.

Sometimes, in the country, Grandmother would sail into our schoolroom, Olga Ivanovna Vezhin, plump, fresh-complexioned, in mittens and lace: "*Bonjour les enfants,*" she would sing out sonorously and then, heavily accenting the prepositions, she informed us: "*Je viens de voir* DANS *le jardin,* PRÈS *du cèdre,* SUR *une rose un papillon de toute beauté: il était bleu, vert, pourpre, doré—et grand comme ça.*" "Quickly take your net," she continued, turning to me, "and go into the garden. Perhaps you can still catch it." And she sailed out, completely oblivious to the fact that if such a fabulous insect were to come my way (it was not even worth a guess as to what banal garden visitor her

where he had once fallen on his knees, weeping and praying (he had bungled his stroke, it had flown for ever!). And what fascination there was in his words, in the kind of special fluency and grace of his style when he spoke about his subject, what affectionate precision in the movements of his fingers turning the screw of a spreading board or a microscope, what a truly enchanting world was unfolded in his lessons! Yes, I know this is not the way to write—these exclamations won't take me very deep—but my pen is not yet accustomed to following the outlines of his image, and I myself abominate these accessory curlicues Oh, don't look at me, my childhood, with such big, frightened eyes.

The sweetness of the lessons! On a warm evening he would take me to a certain small pond to watch the aspen hawk moth swing over the very water, dipping in it the tip of its body. He showed me how to prepare genital armatures to determine species which were externally indistinguishable. With a special smile he brought to my attention the black Ringlet butterflies in our park which with mysterious and elegant unexpectedness appeared only in even years He mixed beer with treacle for me on a dreadfully cold, dreadfully rainy autumn night in order to catch at the smeared tree trunks that glistened in the light of a kerosene lamp a multitude of large, banded moths, silently diving and hurrying toward the bait. He variously warmed and cooled the golden chrysalids of my tortoiseshells so that I was able to get from them Corsican, arctic and entirely unusual forms looking as if they had been dipped in tar and had silky fuzz sticking to them. He taught me how to take apart an ant-hill and find the caterpillar of a Blue which had concluded a barbaric pact with its inhabitants, and I saw how an ant, greedily tickling a hind segment of that caterpillar's clumsy, sluglike little body, forced it to excrete a drop of intoxicant juice, which it swallowed immediately. In compensation it offered its own larvae as food, it was as if cows gave us Chartreuse and we gave them our infants to eat. But the strong caterpillar of one exotic species of Blue will not stoop to this exchange, brazenly devouring the

infant ants and then turning into an impenetrable chrysalis which finally, at the time of hatching, is surrounded by ants (those failures in the school of experience) awaiting the emergence of the helplessly crumpled butterfly in order to attack it, they attack—and nevertheless she does not perish. "I have never laughed so much," said my father, "as when I realized that nature had supplied her with a sticky substance which caused the feelers and feet of those zealous ants to get stuck together, so that they rolled and writhed all around her while she herself, calm and invulnerable, let her wings strenghten and dry."

He told me about the odors of butterflies—musk and vanilla; about the voices of butterflies; about the piercing sound given out by the monstrous caterpillar of a Malayan hawkmoth, an improvement on the mouselike squeak of our Death's Head moth; about the small resonant tympanum of certain tiger moths; about the cunning butterfly in the Brazilian forest which imitates the whir of a local bird. He told me about the incredible artistic wit of mimetic disguise, which was not explainable by the struggle for existence (the rough haste of evolution's unskilled forces), was too refined for the mere deceiving of accidental predators, feathered, scaled and otherwise (not very fastidious, but then not too fond of butterflies), and seemed to have been invented by some waggish artist precisely for the intelligent eyes of man (a hypothesis that may lead far an evolutionist who observes apes feeding on butterflies); he told me about these magic masks of mimicry; about the enormous moth which in a state of repose assumes the image of a snake looking at you; of a tropical geometrid colored in perfect imitation of a species of butterfly infinitely removed from it in nature's system, the illusion of the orange abdomen possessed by one being humorously reproduced in the other by the orange-colored inner margins of the secondaries; and about the curious harem of that famous African swallowtail, whose variously disguised females copy in color, shape and even flight half a dozen different species (apparently inedible), which are also the models of num-

erous other mimics. He told me about migrations, about the long cloud consisting of myriads of white pierids that moves through the sky, indifferent to the direction of the wind, always at the same level above the ground, rising softly and smoothly over hills and sinking again into valleys, meeting perhaps another cloud of butterflies, yellow, filtering through it without stopping and without soiling its own whiteness—and floating further, to settle on trees toward nighttime which stand until morning as if bestrewn with snow—and then taking off again to continue their journey—whither? Why? A tale not yet finished by nature or else forgotten. "Our thistle butterfly," he said, "the 'painted lady' of the English, the *'belle dame'* of the French, does not hibernate in Europe as related species do; it is born on the African plains; there, at dawn, the lucky traveler may hear the whole steppe, listening in the first rays, crackle with an incalculable number of hatching chrysalids." From there, without delay it begins its journey north, reaching the shores of Europe in early spring, suddenly enlivening the gardens of the Crimea and the terraces of the Riviera; without lingering, but leaving individuals everywhere for summer breeding, it proceeds further north and by the end of May, by now in single specimens, it reaches Scotland, Heligoland, our parts and even the extreme north of the earth: it has been caught in Iceland! With a strange crazy flight unlike anything else the bleached, hardly recognizable butterfly, choosing a dry glade, "wheels" in and out of the Leshino firs, and by the end of the summer, on thistleheads, on asters, its lovely pink-flushed offspring is already reveling in life. "Most moving of all," added my father, "is that on the first cold days a reverse phenomenon is observed, the ebb· the butterfly hastens southward, for the winter, but of course it perishes before it reaches the warmth "

Simultaneously with the Englishman Tutt, who observed the same thing in the Swiss Alps as he in the Pamirs, my father discovered the true nature of the corneal formation appearing beneath the abdomen in the impregnated females

of Parnassians, and explained how her mate, working with a pair of spatulate appendages, places and molds on her a chastity belt of his own manufacture, shaped differently in every species of this genus, being sometimes a little boat, sometimes a helical shell, sometimes—as in the case of the exceptionally rare dark-cinder gray *orpheus* Godunov—a replica of a tiny lyre. And as a frontispiece to my present work I think I would like to display precisely this butterfly —for I can hear him talk about it, can see the way he took the six specimens he had brought back out of their six thick triangular enevelopes, the way he lowered his eyes with the field magnifier close to the abdomen of the only female—and how reverently his laboratory assistant relaxed in a damp jar the dry, glossy, tightly folded wings in order later to drive a pin smoothly through the insect's thorax, stick it in the cork groove of the spreading board, hold down flat upon it by means of broad strips of semitransparent paper its open, defenseless, gracefully expanded beauty, then slip a bit of cotton wool under its abdomen and straighten its black antennae—so that it dried that way forever. Forever? In the Berlin museum there are many of my father's captures and these are as fresh today as they were in the eighties and nineties Butterflies from Linnaeus' collection now in London have subsisted since the eighteenth century. In the Prague museum one can see that same example of the showy Atlas moth that Catherine the Great admired. Why then do I feel so sad?

His captures, his observations, the sound of his voice in scientific words, all this, I think, I will preserve. But that is still so little. With the same relative permanence I would like to retain what it was, perhaps, that I loved most of all about him: his live masculinity, inflexibility and independence, the chill and the warmth of his personality, his power over everything that he undertook. As if playing a game, as if wishing in passing to imprint his force on everything, he would pick out here and there something from a field outside entomology and thus he left his mark upon almost all branches of natural science. there is only one

plant described by him out of all those he collected, but that one is a spectacular species of birch; one bird—a most fabulous pheasant; one bat—but the biggest one in the world. And in all parts of nature our name echoes a countless number of times, for other naturalists gave his name either to a spider, or to a rhododendron, or to a mountain ridge—the latter, by the way, made him angry: "To ascertain and preserve the ancient native name of a pass," he wrote, "is always both more scientific and more noble than to saddle it with the name of a good acquaintance."

I liked—I only now understood how much I liked it—that special easy knack he showed in dealing with a horse, a dog, a gun, a bird or a peasant boy with a two-inch splinter in his back—he was constantly being brought people who were wounded, maimed, even infirm, even pregnant women, who probably took his mysterious occupation for voodoo practice. I liked the fact that, in contradistinction to the majority of non-Russian travelers, Sven Hedin for example, he never changed his clothes for Chinese ones on his wanderings; in general he kept aloof, was severe and resolute in the extreme in his relations with the natives, showing no indulgence to mandarins and lamas; and in camp he practiced shooting, which served as an excellent precaution against any importuning. He was entirely uninterested in ethnography, a fact that for some reason greatly irritated certain geographers, and his great friend, the Orientalist Krivtsov, almost wept when reproaching him: "If only you had brought back one wedding song, Konstantin Kirillovich, had described one local dress!" There was one professor at Kazan who attacked him especially; proceeding from some sort of humanitarian-liberal premises he convicted him of scientific aristocratism, of a haughty contempt for Man, of disregard for the reader's interests, of dangerous eccentricity—and of much more. And once at an international banquet in London (and this episode pleases me most of all), Sven Hedin, sitting next to my father, asked him how it had happened that, traveling with unprecedented freedom over the forbidden parts of Tibet,

in the immediate vicinity of Lhasa, he had not gone to look at it, to which my father replied that he had not wanted to sacrifice even one hour's collecting for the sake of visiting "one more filthy little town"—and I can see so clearly how his eyes must have narrowed as he spoke.

He was endowed with an even temper, self-control, strong will power and a vivid sense of humor; but when he became angry his wrath was like a sudden stroke of frost (Grandmother said behind his back: "All the clocks in the house stopped"), and I can well remember those sudden silences at table and the kind of absent-minded look that immediately appeared on Mother's face (ill-wishers among our female kin maintained that she "trembled before Kostya"), and how one of the governesses at the end of the table would hastily place her palm on a glass which was on the point of tinkling. The cause of his wrath could be a blunder by someone, a miscomputation by the steward (Father was well versed in the estate affairs), a flippant remark made about an intimate of his, trite political sentiments in the spirit of soapbox patriotism brought out by some ill-starred guest, or finally some misdemeanor or other of mine. He who in his time had slaughtered countless multitudes of birds, he who had once brought the newly wed botanist Berg the *complete* vegetable covering of a motley little mountain meadow in one piece, the size of a room in area (I imagined it rolled up in a case like a Persian carpet), which he had found somewhere at some fantastic height among bare cliffs and snow—he could not forgive me a Leshino sparrow wantonly shot down with a Montecristo rifle or the young pondside aspen I had slashed with a sword. He could not stand procrastination, hesitation, the blinking eyes of a lie, could not stand hypocrisy or syrupiness—and I am sure that had he caught me out in physical cowardice he would have laid a curse on me.

I have not said everything yet; I am coming up to what is perhaps most important. In and around my father, around this clear and direct strength, there was something difficult to convey in words, a haze, a mystery, an enigmatic reserve

which made itself felt sometimes more, sometimes less. It was as if this genuine, very genuine man possessed an aura of something still unknown but which was perhaps the most genuine of all. It had no direct connection either with us, or with my mother, or with the externals of life, or even with butterflies (the closest of all to him, I daresay): it was neither pensiveness nor melancholy—and I have no means of explaining the impression his face made on me when I looked through his study window from outside and saw how, having suddenly forgotten his work (I could feel inside me how he had forgotten it—as if something had fallen through or trailed off), his large wise head turned slightly away from the desk and resting on his fist, so that a wide crease was raised from his cheek to his temple, he sat for a minute without moving. It sometimes seems to me nowadays that—who knows—he might go off on his journeys not so much to seek something as to flee something, and that on returning, he would realize that it was still with him, inside him, unriddable, inexhaustible. I cannot track down a name for his secret, but I only know that that was the source of that special—neither glad nor morose, having indeed no connection with the outward appearance of human emotions—solitude to which neither my mother nor all the entomologists of the world had any admittance And strange: perhaps the estate watchman, a crooked old man who had twice been singed by night lightning, the sole person among our rural retainers who had learned without my father's help (who had taught it to a whole regiment of Asian hunters) to catch and kill a butterfly without mangling it (which, of course, did not stop him advising me with a businesslike air not to be in a hurry to catch small butterflies, "tiddlers" as he expressed it, in spring, but to wait till summer when they would have grown up), namely he, who frankly and with no fear or surprise considered that my father knew a thing or two that nobody else knew, was in his own way right.

However that may have been, I am convinced now that our life then really was imbued with a magic unknown

in other families. From conversations with my father, from daydreams in his absence, from the neighborhood of thousands of books full of drawings of animals, from the precious shimmer of the collections, from the maps, from all the heraldry of nature and the cabalism of Latin names, life took on a kind of bewitching lightness that made me feel as if my own travels were about to begin. Thence, I borrow my wings today. Among the old, tranquil, velvet-framed family photographs in my father's study there hung a copy of the picture: Marco Polo leaving Venice. She was rosy, this Venice, and the water of her lagoon was azure, with swans twice the size of the boats, into one of which tiny violet men were descending by way of a plank, in order to board a ship which was waiting a little way off with sails furled—and I cannot tear myself way from this mysterious beauty, these ancient colors which swim before the eyes as if seeking new shapes, when I now imagine the outfitting of my father's caravan in Przhevalsk, where he used to go with post-horses from Tashkent, having dispatched in advance by slow convoy a store of supplies for three years. His Cossacks went round the neighboring villages buying horses, mules and camels; they prepared the pack boxes and pouches (what was there not in these Sartish yagtans and leather bags tried by centuries, from cognac to pulverized peas, from ingots of silver to nails for horseshoes); and after a requiem on the shore of the lake by the burial rock of the explorer Przhevalski, crowned with a bronze eagle—around which the intrepid local pheasants were wont to roost—the caravan took the road.

After that I see the caravan, before it gets drawn into the mountains, winding among hills of a paradisean green shade, depending both on their grassy raiment and on the apple-bright epidotic rock, of which they are composed. The compact, sturdy Kalmuk ponies walk in single file forming echelons: the paired packloads of equal weight are seized twice with lariats so that nothing can shift and a Cossack leads every echelon by the bridle. In front of the caravan, a Berdan rifle over his shoulder and a butterfly net

at the ready, wearing spectacles and a nankin blouse, Father rides on his white trotter accompanied by a native horseman. Closing the detachment comes the geodesist Kunitsyn (this is the way I see it), a majestic old man who has spent half a lifetime in imperturable wanderings, with his instruments in cases—chronometers, surveying compasses, an artificial horizon—and when he stops to take a bearing or to note down azimuths in his journal, his horse is held by an assistant, a small anemic German, Ivan Ivanovich Viskott, formerly chemist at Gatchina, whom my father had once taught to prepare bird skins and who took part from then on in all the expeditions, until he died of gangrene in the summer of 1903 in Dyn-Kou.

Further I see the mountains: the Tyan-Shan range. In search of passes (marked on the map according to oral data but first explored by my father) the caravan ascended over steep slopes and narrow ledges, slipped down to the north, to the steppe teeming with saigas, ascended again to the south, here fording torrents, there trying to get across high water—and up, up, along almost impassable trails. How the sunlight played! The dryness of the air produced an amazing contrast between light and shadow: in the light there were such flashes, such a wealth of brilliance, that at times it became impossible to look at a rock, at a stream; and in the shadow a darkness which absorbed all detail, so that every color lived a magically multiplied life and the coats of the horses changed as they entered the cool of the poplars.

The boom of water in the gorge was enough to stun a man; head and breast filled with an electric agitation; the water rushed with awesome force—as smooth, however, as molten lead—then suddenly swelled out monstrously as it reached the rapids, its varicolored waves piling up and falling over the lustrous brows of the stones with a furious roar; and then, crashing from a height of twenty feet, out of a rainbow and into darkness, it ran further, now changed: seething, smoke-blue and snowlike from the foam, it struck first one side and then the other of the conglomeratic

now see evening approaching, drawing a shadow over the mountain slopes. Postponing until the morning a difficult crossing (a ramshackle bridge has been thrown across the turbulent river, consisting of stone slabs on top of brushwood, but the way up on the other side is steepish, and, moreover, as smooth as glass), the caravan settles down for the night. While the colors of sunset still linger in the aerial tiers of the sky, and supper is being prepared, the Cossacks, having first taken off the animals' sweatcloths and felt underblankets, wash the wounds made by the packs. In the darkling air the clear ring of shoeing resounds above the ample noise of water. It has grown quite dark. Father has climbed a rock looking for a place to suit his calcium lamp for catching moths. Thence one can see in Chinese perspective (from above), in a deep gully, the redness, transparent in the darkness, of the campfire; through the edges of its breathing flame seem to float the broad-shouldered shadows of men, endlessly changing their outlines, and a red reflection trembles, without moving from the spot, on the seething water of the river. But above, all is quiet and dark, only rarely does a bell tinkle: the horses, who have already stood to receive their portion of dry fodder, are now roaming among the granite debris. Overhead, frighteningly and entrancingly close, the stars have come out, each conspicuous, each a live orbicle, clearly revealing its globular essence. Moths begin to come to the lure of the lamp: they describe crazy circles around it, hitting the reflector with a ping; they fall, they crawl over the spread sheet into the circle of light, gray, with eyes like burning coals, vibrating, flying up and falling again—and a large, brightly illumined, unhurriedly skillful hand, with almond-shaped fingernails, rakes noctuid after noctuid into the killing jar.

Sometimes he was quite alone, without even this nearness of men sleeping in camp tents, on felt mattresses, around the camel bedded down on the campfire ashes. Taking advantage of lengthy halts in places with abundant food for the caravan animals, Father would go away for several days on reconnaissance, and in doing so, carried

away by some new pierid, more than once ignored the rule of mountain hunting· never to follow a path of no return. And now I continually ask myself what did he use to think about in the solitary night. I try fervently in the darkness to divine the current of his thoughts, and I have much less success with this than with my mental visits to places which I have never seen. What did he think about? About a recent catch? About my mother, about us? About the innate strangeness of human life, a sense of which he mysteriously transmitted to me? Or perhaps I am wrong in retrospectively forcing upon him the secret which he carries now, when newly gloomy and preoccupied, concealing the pain of an unknown wound, concealing death as something shameful, he appears in my dreams, but which then he did not have—but simply was happy in that incompletely named world in which at every step he named the nameless.

After spending the whole summer in the mountains (not one summer but several, in different years, which are superimposed one on another in translucent layers) our caravan moved east through a gulch into a stony desert. We saw gradually disappear both the bed of the stream as it split and fanned out, and those plants that to the last remain faithful to travelers: stunted ammodendrons, lasiagrostis, and ephedras. Having loaded the camels with water we plunged into spectral wilds where here and there big pebbles covered completely the yielding, reddish-brown clay of the desert, in places mottled with crusts of dirty snow and outcrops of salt, which we took in the distance for the walls of the town we sought. The way was dangerous as a result of the terrible storms, during which at midday everything was blanketed in a salty brown fog; the wind roared, granules of gravel lashed one's face, the camels lay down and our tarpaulin tent was torn to shreds. Because of these storms the surface of the land has changed unbelievably, presenting the fantastic outlines of castles, colonnades and staircases, or else the hurricane would scour out a hollow—as if here in this desert the elemental forces that had fashioned the world were still furiously in action. But there

were also days of a wonderful lull, when horned larks (Father aptly called them "gigglers") poured forth their mimetic trills and flocks of ordinary sparrows accompanied our emaciated animals. On occasion we would pass the day in isolated settlements consisting of two or three homesteads and a ruined temple. At other times we would be attacked by Tanguts in sheepskin coats and red-and-blue woolen boots: a brief colorful episode on the way. And then there were the mirages—the mirages where nature, that exquisite cheat, achieved absolute miracles: visions of water were so clear that they reflected the *real* rocks nearby!

Further came the quiet sands of the Gobi, dune after dune went by like waves revealing short ocher horizons, and all that was audible in the velvet air was the labored, quickened breathing of the camels and the scrape of their broad feet. The caravan went onward, now ascending to the crest of a dune, now plunging downward, and by the evening its shadow had attained gigantic proportions. The five-carat diamond of Venus disappeared in the west together with the glow of the sunset, which distorted everything in its blanched, orange and violet light And Father loved to recall how once at such a sunset, in 1893, in the dead heart of the Gobi desert he had met with—taking them at first for phantoms projected by the prismatic rays—two cyclists in Chinese sandals and round felt hats, who turned out to be the Americans Sachtleben and Allen, riding all across Asia to Peking for fun.

Spring awaited us in the mountains of Nan-Shan. Everything foretold it: the babbling of the water in the brooks, the distant thunder of the rivers, the whistle of the creepers which lived in holes on the slippery wet hillsides, the delightful singing of the local larks, and "a mass of noises whose origins are hard to explain" (a phrase from the notes of a friend of my father's, Grigoriy Efimovich Grum-Grzhimaylo, which is fixed in my mind forever and full of the amazing music of truth because written not by an ignorant poet but by a naturalist of genius). On the southern slopes

we had already met our first interesting butterfly—Potanin's subspecies of Butler's pierid—and in the valley to which we descended by way of a torrent bed we found real summer. All the slopes were studded with anemones and primulae. Przhevalski's gazelle and Strauch's pheasant tempted the hunters. And what sunrises there were! Only in China is the early mist so enchanting, causing everything to vibrate, the fantastic outlines of hovels, the dawning crags. As into an abyss, the river runs into the murk of the prematutinal twilight that still hangs in the gorges, while higher up, along flowing waters, all glimmers and scintillates, and quite a company of blue magpies has already awakened in the willows by the mill.

Escorted by fifteen Chinese foot soldiers armed with halberds and carrying enormous, absurdly bright banners, we crossed passes through the ridge a number of times. In spite of it being the middle of summer, night frosts were so bad there that in the morning the flowers were filmed with rime and had become so brittle that they snapped underfoot with a surprising, gentle tinkle; but two hours later, just as soon as the sun began to be warm, the wonderful Alpine flora again resplended, again scented the air with resin and honey. Clinging to steep banks we made our way under the hot blue sky; grasshoppers shot from under our feet, the dogs ran with their tongues hanging out, seeking refuge from the heat in the short shadows thrown by the horses. The water in the wells smelled of gunpowder. The trees seemed to be a botanist's delirium: a white rowan with alabaster berries or a birch with red bark!

Placing one foot on a fragment of rock and leaning slightly on the handle of his net, my father looks down from a high spur, from the glacier boulders of Tanegma, at the lake Kuká-Nor—a huge spread of dark blue water. There down below on the golden steppes a herd of kiangs rushes past, and the shadow of an eagle flicks across the cliffs; overheard there is perfect peace, silence, transparency . . . and again I ask myself what Father is thinking about when he is not busy collecting and stands there like that, quite

still . . . appearing as it were on the crest of my recollection, torturing me, enrapturing me—to the point of pain, to an insanity of tenderness, envy and love, tormenting my soul with his inscrutable solitariness.

There were the times when going up the Yellow River and its tributaries, on some splendid September morning, in the lily thickets and hollows on the banks, he and I would take Elwes' Swallowtail—a black wonder with tails in the shape of hooves. On inclement evenings, before sleeping, he would read Horace, Montaigne, and Pushkin—the three books he had brought with him. One winter when crossing the ice of a river I noticed in the distance a line of dark objects strung across it, the large horns of twenty wild yaks which had been caught in crossing by the suddenly forming ice; through its thick crystal the immobilization of their bodies in a swimming attitude was clearly visible; the beautiful heads lifted above the ice would have seemed alive if the birds had not already pecked out their eyes; and for some reason I recalled the tyrant Shiusin, who used to cut open pregnant women out of curiosity and who, one cold morning, seeing some porters fording a stream, ordered their legs to be amputated at the shin in order to inspect the condition of the marrow in their bones.

In Chang during a fire (some wood prepared for the construction of a Catholic mission was burning) I saw an elderly Chinese at a safe distance from the fire throwing water assiduously, determinedly and without tiring over the *reflection* of the flames on the walls of his dwelling; convinced of the impossibility of proving to him that his house was not burning we abandoned him to his fruitless occupation.

Frequently we had to push our way through, ignoring Chinese intimidation and interdictions: good marksmanship is the best passport. In Tatsien-Lu shaven-headed lamas roamed about the crooked, narrow streets spreading the rumor that I was catching children in order to brew their eyes into a potion for the belly of my Kodak. There on the slopes of a snowy range, which were drowned in the

rich, rosy foam of great rhododendrons (we used their branches at night for our campfires), I looked in May for the slate-gray, orange-spotted larvae of the Imperatorial Apollo and for its chrysalis, fastened by means of a silk thread to the underside of a stone. That same day, I remember, we glimpsed a white Tibetan bear and discovered a new snake: it fed on mice, and the mouse I extracted from its stomach also turned out to be an undescribed species. From the rhododendrons and from the pines draped in lacy lichen came a heady smell of resin. In my vicinity some witch doctors with the wary and crafty look of competitors were collecting for their mercenary needs Chinese rhubarb, whose root bears an extraordinary resemblance to a caterpillar, right down to its prolegs and spiracles—while I, in the meantime, found under a stone the caterpillar of an unknown moth, which represented not in a general way but with absolute concreteness a copy of that root, so that it was not quite clear which was impersonating which—or why.

Everyone tells lies in Tibet: it was devilishly hard to obtain the exact names of places or directions for the right roads; involuntarily I too deceived them: since they were unable to distinguish a light-haired European from a white-haired one they took me, a young chap with hair bleached in the sun, for an ancient old man Everywhere on the masses of granite one could read the "mystic formula," a shamanic jumble of words which certain poetic travelers "translate" prettily as: oh, jewel in the lotus, oh! Some kind of officials were sent out to me from Lhasa who conjured me not to do something and threatened to do something to me—I paid little attention to them; however, I remember one idiot, particularly tiresome, in yellow silk under a red umbrella, he was sitting astride a mule whose natural dolefulness was doubled by the presence under its eyes of thick icicles formed from frozen tears.

From a great height I saw a dark marshy depression all trembling from the play of innumerable springs, which recalled the night sky with stars scattered over it—and that

is what it was called: the Starry Steppe. The passes ascended beyond the clouds, marches were tough. We rubbed the pack animals' wounds with a mixture of iodoform and vaseline. On occasion, having camped in a completely deserted spot, I would suddenly see in the morning that around us during the night a wide circle of brigands' tents had grown up like black toadstools—which, however, very quickly disappeared.

Having explored the uplands of Tibet I headed for Lob-Nor in order to return from there to Russia. The Tarym, overcome by the desert, exhausted, forms with its last waters an extensive reedy swamp, the present-day Kara-Koshuk-Kul, Przhevalski's Lob-Nor—and Lob-Nor at the time of the Khans, whatever Ritthofen might say. It is fringed with salt marshes but the water is salt only at the edges—for those rushes would not grow around a salt lake. One spring I was five days going round it. There in twenty-foot-high reeds I had the luck to discover a remarkable semi-aquatic moth with a rudimentary system of veins. The bunchy salt marsh was strewn with the shells of mollusks. In the evenings the harmonious, melodic sounds of swan flights reverberated through the silence; the yellow of the rushes distinctly brought out the lusterless white of the birds. In 1862, sixty Russian Old-Believers with their wives and children lived for half a year in these parts, after which they went to Turfan, and where they went thence nobody knows.

Further on comes the desert of Lob: a stony plain, tiers of clay precipices, glassy salt ponds; that pale fleck in the gray air is a lone individual of Roborovski's White, carried away by the wind. In this desert are preserved traces of an ancient road along which Marco Polo passed six centuries before I did: its markers are piles of stones. Just as I had heard in a Tibetan gorge the interesting drumlike roar which had frightened our first pilgrims, so in the desert during the sandstorms I also saw and heard the same as Marco Polo: "the whisper of spirits calling you aside" and the queer flicker of the air, an endless progression of whirl-

winds, caravans and armies of phantoms coming to meet you, thousands of spectral faces in their incorporeal way pressing upon you, through you, and suddenly dispersing. In the twenties of the fourteenth century when the great explorer was dying, his friends gathered by his bedside and implored him to reject what in his book had seemed incredible to them—to water down its miracles by means of judicious deletions; but he responded that he had not recounted even a half of what he had in fact seen.

All this lingered bewitchingly, full of color and air, with lively movement in the foreground and a convincing backdrop; then, like smoke from a breeze, it shifted and dispersed—and Fyodor saw again the dead and impossible tulips of his wallpaper, the crumbling mound of cigarette butts in the ashtray, and the lamp's reflection in the black windowpane. He threw open the window. The written-up sheets of paper on his desk started; one folded over, another glided onto the floor. The room immediately turned damp and cold. Down below, an automobile went slowly along the dark empty street—and, strangely enough, this very slowness reminded Fyodor of a host of petty, unpleasant things—the day just past, the missed lesson—and when he thought that next morning he would have to phone the deceived old man, his heart was oppressed by an abominable despondency. But once the window was closed again, already feeling the void between his bunched fingers, he turned to the patiently waiting lamp, to the scattered first drafts, to the still-warm pen which now quietly slipped back into his fingers (explaining the void and filling it) and returned at once to that world which was as natural to him as snow to the white hare or water to Ophelia

He remembered with incredible vividness, as if he had preserved that sunny day in a velvet case, his father's last return, in July 1912. Elizaveta Pavlovna had already gone the six miles to the station to meet her husband: she always met him alone and it always happened that no one knew with any clearness which side they would return on, to the right or left of the house, since there were two roads, one

longer and smoother—along the highway and through the village; the other shorter and bumpier—through Peshchanka. Fyodor put on his riding breeches just in case and ordered his horse saddled, but nonetheless he could not make up his mind to ride out and meet his father because he was afraid of missing him. He tried vainly to come to terms with inflated, exaggerated time. A rare butterfly taken a day or two before among the blueberries of a peat bog had not yet dried on the spreading board: he kept touching its abdomen with the end of a pin—alas it was still soft, and this meant it was impossible to take off the paper strips completely covering the wings which he was so keen to show his father in all their beauty. He loafed about the manor, feeling the weight and pain of his agitation, and envying the way the others got through these big, empty minutes. From the river came the desperately ecstatic shrieks of the village boys bathing, and this hubbub, playing constantly in the depths of the summer day, sounded like distant ovations. Tanya was swinging enthusiastically and powerfully on the swing in the garden, standing on the seat; the violet shadow of the foliage swept over her flying white skirt in variegations that made one blink, and her blouse now lagged behind, now clung to her back, designating the hollow between her drawn-back shoulders, beneath her, one fox terrier was barking at her, another was chasing a wagtail; the ropes creaked joyfully and it seemed that Tanya was soaring up like that in order to see over the trees into the road. Our French governess, under her moiré parasol, with rare politeness was sharing her misgivings ("the train was two hours late or else would not come at all") with Mr. Browning, whom she hated, while the latter stood slapping his gaiters with a riding stick—he was no polyglot Yvonna Ivanovna kept visiting first one and then the other veranda with that discontented expression on her small face with which she greeted all joyful events. Around the outbuildings there was especial animation: servants pumped water, hacked firewood, and the gardener came bringing two oblong, red-stained baskets of strawberries.

Zhaksybay, an elderly Kirghiz, thickset, fat-faced, with intricate wrinkles around his eyes, who had saved Konstantin Kirillovich's life in '92 (he had shot a she-bear that was mauling him) and who now lived in peace, nursing his hernia, in their Leshino house, had put on his blue *beshmet* with half-moon pockets, polished boots, red skullcap with spangles and silk, tasseled sash, and settled down on a bench near the kitchen porch, where by now he had been sitting for quite a time sunning himself, a silver watch chain gleaming on his chest, in quiet and festive expectation.

Suddenly, running heavily up the curved path which led down to the river, there appeared out of deep shadow, with a wild glint in his eyes and with a mouth that was already shaped for a shout though still silent, the old, gray, side-whiskered footman Kazimir: he was running with the news that beyond the nearest bend, the sound of hooves had been heard on the bridge (a swift wooden drumming which was immediately cut off)—a guarantee that the victoria was about to come bowling next minute along the dirt road parallel to the park. Fyodor rushed in that direction—between the tree trunks, over the moss and bilberries—and there beyond the marginal path one could see, as they skimmed above the level of the young firs, the driver's head and indigo sleeves sweeping by with the impetuosity of a vision. He dashed back—and the abandoned swing was still quivering in the garden, while by the porch stood the empty victoria with its crumpled traveling rug; his mother was walking up the steps, trailing behind her a smoke-colored scarf—and Tanya was hanging on the neck of her father, who had taken a watch from his pocket with his free hand and was looking at it, for he always liked to know how fast he had got home from the station.

The following year, busy with scientific work, he did not go anywhere, but by the spring of 1914 he had already begun to prepare for a new expedition to Tibet together with the ornithologist Petrov and the English botanist Ross. War with Germany suddenly canceled all this.

He looked upon the war as a tiresome obstacle which

became more and more tiresome as time went on. His kinsfolk were for some reason certain that Konstantin Kirillovich would volunteer and set off right away at the head of a detachment: they considered him an eccentric, but a manly eccentric. Actually, Konstantin Kirillovich, who was now over fifty but had retained untapped reserves of health, agility, freshness and strength—and perhaps was even more ready than before to overcome mountains, Tanguts, bad weather and a thousand other dangers undreamt of by stay-at-homes—now not only stayed at home but tried not to notice the war, and if he ever spoke about it, he did so only with angry contempt "My father," wrote Fyodor, recalling that time, "not only taught me a great deal but also trained my very thoughts, as a voice or hand is trained, according to the rules of his school. Thus I was rather indifferent to the cruelty of war; I even conceded that one could take a certain delight in the accuracy of a shot, in the danger of a reconnaissance or in the delicacy of a maneuver; but these little pleasures (which are better represented moreover in other special branches of sport, such as: tiger hunting, noughts and crosses, professional boxing) in no way compensated for that touch of dismal idiocy which is inherent in any war."

However, in spite of "Kostya's unpatriotic position" as Aunt Ksenia expressed it (solidly and skillfully using "high connections" to hide her officer-husband away in the shadows of the rear) the house was penetrated by the cares of war. Elizaveta Pavlovna was drawn into Red Cross work, which had people comment that her energy "was making up for her husband's idleness," he being "more concerned with Asian bugs than with the glory of Russian arms" as was actually pointed out, by the way, in one jaunty newspaper. Phonograph records revolved with the words of the love song "The Sea Gull" reclad in khaki (. . . here's a young ensign with an infantry section . . .); coy nurses appeared in the house with little curls peeping out from under their regulation headdress and a deft way of tapping cigarettes on their cigarette cases

before lighting up; the doorkeeper's son ran away to the front and Konstantin Kirillovich was asked to assist his return; Tanya began visiting her mother's military hospital to give Russian grammar lessons to a placid, bearded Oriental whose leg was being cut off ever higher in an attempt to overtake the gangrene; Yvonna Ivanovna knit woolen wrist-warmers; on holidays the variety artist Feona entertained the soldiers with vaudeville songs; the hospital staff staged *Vova Makes the Best of It,* a play on draft dodgers; and the newspapers printed versicles dedicated to the war:

> Today thou art Fate's scourge o'er our dear land,
> But with bright joy the Russian's gaze will shine
> When he sees Time dispassionately brand
> The German Attila with Shame's own sign!

In the spring of 1915, instead of getting ready to move from St. Petersburg to Leshino, which always seemed as natural and unshakable as the succession of months in the calendar, we went for the summer to our Crimean estate—on the coast between Yalta and Alupka. On the sloping lawns of the heavenly-green garden, his face distorted with anguish, his hands trembling with happiness, Fyodor boxed southern butterflies; but the genuine Crimean rarities were to be found not here among the myrtles, wax shrubs, and magnolias but much higher, in the mountains, among the rocks of Ai-Petri and on the grassy plateau of the Yayla; more than once that summer his father accompanied him up a trail through the pinewoods in order to show him, with a smile of condescension for this European trifle, the Satyrid recently described by Kuznetsov, which was flitting from stone to stone in the very place where some vulgar daredevil had carved his name in the sheer rock. These walks were Konstantin Kirillovich's only distraction. It was not that he was gloomy or irritable (these limited epithets did not tally with his spiritual style) but that, putting it simply, he was fretting—and Elizaveta Pavlovna and the children were perfectly aware of what it was he

wanted. Suddenly in August he went away for a short time; where he went no one except those closest to him knew; he covered up his journey so thoroughly as to excite the envy of any traveling terrorist; it was funny and frightening to imagine how Russian public opinion would have wrung its little hands had it learned that at the height of the war Godunov-Cherdyntsev had traveled to Geneva to meet a fat, bald, extraordinarily jovial German professor (a third conspirator was also present, an old Englishman wearing thin-rimmed spectacles and a roomy gray suit), that they had come together there in a small room in a modest hotel for a scientific consultation, and that having discussed what was necessary (the subject was a work of many volumes, stubbornly continuing publication in Stuttgart with long-standing cooperation of foreign specialists on separate groups of butterflies) they peaceably parted—each in his own direction. But this trip did not cheer him up; on the contrary, the constant dream weighing on him even increased its secret pressure. In the autumn they returned to St. Petersburg; he worked strenuously on the fifth volume of *Butterflies and Moths of the Russian Empire,* went out rarely and—fuming more at his opponent's blunders than at his own—played chess with the recently widowed botanist Berg. He would look through the daily papers with an ironical smile; he would take Tanya on his knees, then lapse into pensiveness, and his hand on Tanya's round shoulder would grow pensive too. Once in November he was given a telegram at table, he unsealed it, read it to himself, read it again to judge by the second movement of his eyes, laid it aside, took a sip of port wine from a ladle-shaped goblet of gold, and imperturbably continued his conversation with a poor relative of ours, a little old man with freckles all over his skull who came to dinner twice a month and invariably brought Tanya soft, sticky toffees—*tyanushki.* When the guests had departed he sank into an armchair, took off his glasses, passed his palm from top to bottom over his face and announced in an even voice that Uncle Oleg had been dangerously wounded in the stomach

by a grenade fragment (while working at a first-aid post under fire)—and immediately there stood out in Fyodor's soul, tearing it with its sharp edges, one of those numberless deliberately grotesque dialogues that the brothers had still so recently indulged in at table:

UNCLE OLEG (*in a bantering tone*)
Well, tell me, Kostya, did you ever happen to see on the Wie reservation the little bird So-was?

FATHER (*curtly*)
I'm afraid I did not.

UNCLE OLEG (*warming up*)
And Kostya, did you never see Popovski's horse stung by Popov's fly?

FATHER (*even more curtly*)
Never.

UNCLE OLEG (*completely ecstatic*)
And have you never had occasion, for example, to observe the diagonal motion of entoptic swarms?

FATHER (*looking him straight in the eye*)
I have.

That same night he set out for Galicia to get him, brought him back extremely quickly and comfortably, obtained the best of the best doctors, Gershenzon, Yezhov, Miller-Melnitski, and himself attended two protracted operations. By Christmas his brother was well. And then something suddenly changed in Konstantin Kirillovich's mood: his eyes came to life and softened, one again heard that musical humming which he used to emit on the move when he was particularly pleased about something, he went off somewhere, certain boxes arrived and departed and in the house, around all this mysterious gaiety of the master's, one could sense a growing feeling of indefinite, expectant perplexity—and once when Fyodor happened to be passing through the gilt reception hall, bathed in spring sunshine, he suddenly noticed the brass handle of the white door leading into Father's study jiggle but not turn, as if someone was limply fingering it without opening the door; but

then it quietly opened and Mother came out with a vague meek smile on her tear-stained face, making an odd gesture of helplessness as she went past Fyodor. He knocked on his father's door and entered the study. "What do you want?" asked Konstantin Kirillovich without looking up or stopping writing. "Take me with you," said Fyodor.

The fact that at the most alarming time, when Russia's borders were crumbling and her inner flesh was being eaten away, Konstantin Kirillovich suddenly planned to abandon his family for two years for the sake of a scientific expedition into a remote country, struck most people as a wild caprice, a monstrous frivolity. There was even talk that the government "would not permit purchase of provision," that "the madman" would get neither traveling companions nor pack animals. But no further away than in Turkestan the peculiar smell of the epoch was hardly perceptible; practically the only reminder of it was a reception organized by some district administrators to which the guests brought gifts to aid the war (a little later a rebellion broke out among the Kirghiz and the Cossacks in connection with the summons to do war work). Just before his departure in June 1916, Godunov-Cherdyntsev came from town to Leshino to bid his family farewell. Until the very last minute Fyodor dreamed that his father would take him with him—once he had said he would do so as soon as his son was fifteen—"At any other time I would take you," he said now, as if forgetting that for him time was always *another* one.

In itself this last farewell was in no way different from preceding ones. After the orderly succession of embraces worked out by family custom, both parents, donning identical amber goggles with suede blinkers, settled themselves in a red touring car; all around stood the servants; leaning on his stick, the old watchman remained at a distance by the lightning-split poplar; the driver, a short, fat, round little man in velveteen livery and orange gaiters—with a carroty nape and a topaze on his pudgy hand—straining horribly, jerked, jerked again, started the engine (Mother and Fa-

camomile, took off as if backing from it, and the flower it left straightened up and started to sway. A few Black-veined Whites flew about lazily; one or two were spattered with bloodlike pupal discharge (spots of which on the white walls of cities predicted to our ancestors the fall of Troy, plagues, earthquakes). The first chocolate *Aphantopus* Ringlets were already fluttering, with a bouncy, unsteady motion over the grass, and pale micros rose from it, immediately falling again. A blue-and-red Burnet moth with blue antennae, resembling a beetle in fancy dress, was settled on a scabiosa in company with a midge. Hastily abandoning the meadow to alight on an alder leaf, a female cabbage butterfly by means of an odd upturn of her abdomen and the flat spread of her wings (somewhat reminiscent of flattened-back ears), informed her badly rubbed pursuer that she was already impregnated. Two violet-tinged Coppers (*their* females were not yet out) tangled in lightning-swift flight in midair, zoomed, spinning one around the other, scrapping furiously, ascending ever higher and higher—and suddenly shot apart, returning to the flowers. An Amandus Blue in passing annoyed a bee. A dusky Freya Fritillary flicked by among the Selenas. A small hummingbird moth with a bumblebee's body and glasslike wings, beating invisibly, tried from the air a flower with its long proboscis, darted to another and then to a third. All this fascinating life, by whose present blend one could infallibly tell both the age of the summer (with an accuracy almost to within one day), the geographical location of the area, and the vegetal composition of the clearing—all this that was living, genuine and eternally dear to him, Fyodor perceived in a flash, with one penetrating and experienced glance. Suddenly he placed a fist against the trunk of a birch tree and leaning on it, burst into tears.

Although his father had no liking for folklore, he used to cite one remarkable Kirghiz fairy tale. The only son of a great khan, having lost his way during a hunt (thus begin the best fairy tales and thus end the best lives), caught sight

among the trees of something sparkling Coming closer he saw it was a girl gathering brushwood, in a dress made of fish-scales, however, he could not decide what precisely was sparkling so much, the girl's face or her clothing. Going with her to her old mother, the young prince offered to give her as bride-money a nugget of gold the size of a horse's head. "No," said the girl, "but here, take this tiny bag—it's little bigger than a thimble as you can see—go and fill it." The prince, laughing ("Not even one," he said, "will go in"), threw in a coin, threw in another, a third, and then all that he had with him. Extremely puzzled, he went off to consult his father.

All his treasures gathering,
public funds and everything,
in the bag the good khan threw;
shook, and listened, shook anew;
threw in twice as much again:
just a dingle in the drain!

They summoned the old woman. "That," she said, "is a human eye—it wants to encompass everything in the world"; then she took a pinch of earth and filled up the bag immediately.

The last reliable evidence concerning my father (not counting his own letters) I found in some notes by the French missionary (and learned botanist) Barraud, who in the summer of 1917 chanced to meet him in the mountains of Tibet, near the village of Chetu "I was amazed to see," writes Barraud (*Exploration catholique* for 1923), "a saddled white horse grazing in a mountain meadow. Presently a man in European dress appeared, descending from the rocks; he greeted me in French and turned out to be the famous Russian traveler Godunov. I had not seen a European for over eight years. We passed several delightful minutes on the sward in the shade of a rock, discussing a fine nomenclatorial point in connection with the scientific name of a tiny, light blue iris which grew in the vicinity, and then, exchanging an amicable farewell, we parted, he

to his companions calling him from a ravine and I to Father Martin, dying in a remote hostelry."

Beyond this there is fog. Judging by my father's last letter, brief as usual but unusually alarmed, which was delivered to us by a miracle at the beginning of 1918, he was preparing soon after he met Barraud to make the return journey. Having heard of the revolution he asked us in it to move to Finland, where our aunt had a country house, and he wrote that according to his calculations he would be home "with the maximum haste" by the summer. We waited two summers for him, until the winter of 1919. We lived some of the time in Finland and some in St. Petersburg. Our house had long since been plundered but Father's museum, the heart of the house, as if retaining the invulnerability inherent in sacred objects, survived whole (later coming under the jurisdiction of the Academy of Sciences), and this joy completely compensated for the demise of chairs and tables familiar since childhood. We lived in St. Petersburg in two rooms in Grandmother's flat. For some reason or other she was twice taken off for questioning. She caught cold and died. A few days after that, on one of those terrible winter evenings, hungry and hopeless, which played such an ominously close part in the civil disorder, an unknown youth visited me, in pince-nez, unprepossessing and uncommunicative, and asked me to call immediately on his uncle, the geographer Berezovski. He did not know or did not want to say what for, but suddenly everything somehow crumbled inside me and I began to live mechanically. Nowadays, several years later, I sometimes meet this Misha in the Russian bookshop in Berlin where he works—and every time I see him, although we talk little, I feel a hot shiver run down the whole of my spinal column and my whole being relives our brief road together. My mother was not there when this Misha came (this name I shall also remember forever) but we met her on our way downstairs; not knowing my companion she anxiously asked where I was going I replied I was going for some hair clippers of which we had happened to be

speaking a few days beforehand Later I often dreamed about them, those nonexistent clippers, which took the most unexpected forms—mountains, landing stages, coffins, hand organs—but I always knew with a dreamer's instinct that it was clippers "Wait," cried Mother, but we were already downstairs. We walked along the street quickly and silently, he slightly ahead of me. I looked at the masks of the houses, at the humps of the snowdrifts, and I tried to outwit fate by imagining to myself (and thus destroying its possibility in advance) the still uncomprehended, black, fresh grief which I would carry back home. We entered a room which I recall as being completely yellow, and there an old man with a pointed beard, wearing a field jacket and jackboots, informed me without preamble that according to still unverified information my father was no longer living. Mother was waiting for me below, on the street.

During the next six-months (until Uncle Oleg almost forcibly took us abroad) we tried to find out how, and where, he had perished—and indeed whether he had perished at all. Apart from the fact that it happened in Siberia (Siberia is a big place!) on the return journey from Central Asia, we found out nothing at all. Can it be that they hid from us the place and circumstances of his mysterious death and have continued to hide them to this day? (His biography in the Soviet Encyclopaedia ends simply with the words: *He died in 1919.*) Or did the contradictoriness of the vague evidence truly rule out any explicitness in their answers? Once in Berlin we learned one or two supplementary things from various sources and from various people, but these supplements turned out to be nothing but new layers of uncertainty rather than glimpses through it Two shaky versions, both more or less of a deductive nature (and telling us nothing, moreover, about the most important point: how exactly did he die—if he died), were entangled in one another and mutually contradictory. According to one of them, news of his death was brought to Semipalatinsk by a Kirghiz, according to the other, it was

brought by a Cossack to Ak-Bulat. What was my father's route? Was he going from Semirechie to Omsk (by way of the feather-grass steppe, with the guide on a piebald pony) or from the Pamirs to Orenburg through the Turgay region (by way of the sandy steppe, with the guide on a camel, he himself on a horse, birchbark-stirruped, from well to well, avoiding villages and railway lines)? How did he pass through the storm of the peasant war, how did he steer clear of the Reds? I cannot make anything out. And then, what kind of *shapka-nevidimka,* "invisible-making cap," could have fitted him, who would have worn even that at a rakish angle? Did he hide in fishermen's huts (as Krüger supposes) at the post "Aralskoye more" among the stolid Urals Old-Believers? And if he died, how did he die? "What is your profession?" Pugachyov asked the astronomer Lowitz. "Counting the stars." Whereupon they hanged him so he could be nearer the stars. Oh, how did he die? From illness? From exposure? From thirst? By the hand of man? And if—by somebody's hand, can that hand be still living, taking bread, raising a glass, chasing flies, stirring, pointing, beckoning, lying motionless, shaking other hands? Did he return their fire for a long time? Did he save a last bullet for himself? Was he taken alive? Did they bring him to the parlor car at the railway headquarters of some punitive detachment (I can see its hideous locomotive stoked with dried fish), having suspected him of being a White spy (and not without reason: he knew well the White general, Lavr Kornilov, with whom once in his youth he had traveled over the Steppe of Despair and whom in later years he had seen in China)? Did they shoot him in the ladies' room of some godforsaken station (broken looking glass, tattered plush), or did they lead him out into some kitchen garden one dark night and wait for the moon to peep out? How did he wait with them in the dark? With a smile of disdain? And if a whitish moth had hovered among the shadowy burdocks he would, even at that moment, I *know,* have followed it with that same glance of encouragement with which, on occasion, after

evening tea, smoking his pipe in our Leshino garden, he used to greet the pink hawks sampling our lilacs

But sometimes I get the impression that all this is a rubbishy rumor, a tired legend, that it has been created out of those same suspicious granules of approximate knowledge that I use myself when my dreams muddle through regions known to me only by hearsay or out of books, so that the first knowledgeable person who has really seen at the time the places referred to will refuse to recognize them, will make fun of the exoticism of my thoughts, the hills of my sorrow, the precipices of my imagination, and will find in my conjectures just as many topographical errors as he will anachronisms. So much the better. Once the rumor of my father's death is a fiction, must it not then be conceded that his very journey out of Asia is merely attached in the shape of a tail to this fiction (like that kite which in Pushkin's story young Grinyov fashioned out of a map), and that perhaps, if my father even did set out on this return journey (and was not dashed to pieces in an abyss, not held in captivity by Buddhist monks) he chose a completely different road? I have even had occasion to hear surmises (sounding like belated advice) that he could well have proceeded west to Ladakh in order to go south into India, or why could he not have pushed on to China and from there, on any ship to any port in the world?

"Whether it was this way or that, Mother, all material connected with his life is now collected at my place. Out of swarms of drafts, long manuscript extracts from books, indecipherable jottings on miscellaneous sheets of paper, penciled remarks straggling over the margins of other writings of mine; out of half-crossed-out sentences, unfinished words, and improvidently abbreviated, already forgotten names, hiding from full view among my papers; out of the fragile staticism of irredeemable information, already destroyed in places by a too swift movement of thought, which in turn dissolved into nothingness, out of all this I must now make a lucid, orderly book. At times I feel that somewhere it has already been written by me, that it is

here, hiding in this inky jungle, that I have only to free it part by part from the darkness and the parts will fall together of themselves. . . . But what is the use of that to me when this labor of liberation now seems to me so difficult and complicated and when I am so much afraid I might dirty it with a flashy phrase, or wear it out in the course of transfer onto paper, that I already doubt whether the book will be written at all. You yourself wrote to me of the demands which in such a task should be presupposed. But now I am of the opinion that I would fulfill them badly. Do not scold me for weakness and cowardice. Sometime I shall read you at random disjointed and inchoate extracts from what I have written: how little it resembles my statuesque dream! All these months while I was making my research, taking notes, recollecting and thinking, I was blissfully happy: I was certain that something unprecedentedly beautiful was being created, that my notes were merely small props for the work, trail-marks, pegs, and that the most important thing was developing and being created of itself, but now I see, like waking up on the floor, that besides these pitiful notes there is nothing. What shall I do? You know, when I read his or Grum's books and I hear their entrancing rhythm, when I study the position of the words that can neither be replaced nor rearranged, it seems to me a sacrilege to take all this and dilute it with myself. If you like I'll admit it: I myself am a mere seeker of verbal adventures, and forgive me if I refuse to hunt down my fancies on my father's own collecting ground. I have realized, you see, the impossibility of having the imagery of his travels germinate without contaminating them with a kind of secondary poetization, which keeps departing further and further from that real poetry with which the live experience of these receptive, knowledgeable and chaste naturalists endowed their research."

"Of course I understand and sympathize," answered his mother. "It is a pity you cannot manage it, but of course you must not force yourself. On the other hand I am convinced that you are exaggerating a little. I am convinced

that, if you thought less about style, about difficulties, about the poetaster's cliché that 'with a kiss starts the death of romance,' etc., you would produce something very good, very true and very interesting. Only if you imagine him reading your book and you feel it grates upon him, and makes you ashamed, then, of course, give it up, give it up. But I know this cannot be, I know he would tell you: well done. Even more: I am convinced that some day you shall yet write this book."

The external stimulus to the cancel of his work was provided for Fyodor by his removal to another lodging. To his landlady's credit it must be said that she had put up with him for a very long time, for two years. But when she was offered the chance of obtaining an ideal roomer in April—an elderly spinster rising at seven thirty, working in an office till six, dining at her sister's and retiring at ten—Frau Stoboy requested Fryodor to find himself another roof within the month. He continually postponed his inquiries, not only out of laziness and an optimistic tendency to endow a stretch of granted time with the rounded shape of eternity, but also because he found it unbearably nasty to invade alien worlds for the purpose of discovering a place for himself. Mme. Chernyshevski, however, promised him her assistance. March was drawing to an end when, one evening, she said to him:

"I think I have something for you. You once saw here Tamara Grigorievna, the Armenian lady. Sh[illegible] d a room in the flat of a Russian family but now [illegible] it over to somebody."

"Which means [illegible] room if she w[illegible] it," remarked F[illegible] y.

"No, it's sim[illegible] going back to [illegible] However, if you [illegible] advance th[illegible] anything about it [illegible]

[illegible] 't mear [illegible] d Fyc [illegible]

[illegible] room

"Oh, of course," said Fyodor.

"Since I know you," continued Mme. Chernyshevski, already leafing through a black notebook, "and since I know you'll never ring yourself . . ."

"I'll do it first thing tomorrow," said Fyodor.

". . . since you will never do it—Uhland forty-eight thirty-one—I'll do it myself. I'll get her right now and you can ask her everything."

"Stop, wait a minute," said Fyodor anxiously. "I have no idea what I have to ask."

"Don't worry, she'll tell you herself." And Mme. Chernyshevski, rapidly repeating the number under her breath, stretched her hand toward the little table with the telephone.

As soon as she put the receiver to her ear her body assumed its usual telephone posture on the sofa; from a sitting attitude she slipped into a reclining one, adjusted her skirt without looking, and her blue eyes wandered here and there as she waited to be connected. "It would be nice—" she began, but then the girl answered and Mme. Chernyshevski said the number with a kind of abstract exhortation in her tone and a special rhythm in her pronunciation of the figures—as if 48 was the thesis and 31 the antithesis—adding in the shape of a synthesis: *ja wohl.*

"It would be nice," she re-addressed Fyodor, "if she went there with you. I'm sure you've never in your life . . ." Suddenly, with a smile, dropping her eyes, moving a plump shoulder and slightly crossing her outstretched legs: "Tamara Grigorievna?" she asked in a new voice, suave and inviting She laughed softly as she listened, pinching a fold in her skirt. "Yes, it's me, you're right. I thought that as always you wouldn't recognize me. All right—let's say often " Settling her tone even more comfortably: "Well, what's new?" She listened to what was new, blinking; as if in parenthesis she pushed a box of fruit-paste bonbons in Fyodor's direction; then the toes of her small feet in their shabby velvet slippers began to rub gently against one another; the[illegible]ed. "Yes, so I've heard, but I thought he

had a permanent practice." She continued to listen. One could make out in the silence the infinitely small drumming of the voice from another world "Well, that's ridiculous," said Alexandra Yakovlevna, "oh, that's ridiculous." . . . "So that's how things are with you," she drawled after a moment, and then, to a quick question which sounded to Fyodor like a microscopic bark, she replied with a sigh: "Yes, more or less, nothing new. Alexander Yakovlevich is well, keeps himself busy, he's at a concert now, and I have nothing to report, nothing special. Right now I have here . . . Well, of course, it amuses him, but you can't imagine how I sometimes dream of going away somewhere with him, even if only for a month. What's that? Oh, anywhere. Generally speaking, things get a little depressing at times, but otherwise there's nothing new." She slowly inspected her palm and remained like that with her hand before her. "Tamara Grigorievna, I have Godunov-Cherdyntsev here. By the way, he's looking for a room. Do those people of yours. . . . Oh, that's wonderful. Wait a minute, I'm passing him the receiver."

"How do you do?" said Fyodor, bowing to the telephone. "I've been told by Alexandra Yakovlevna—"

Loudly, so that it even tickled his middle ear, an extraordinarily nimble and distinct voice took over the conversation. "The room's not yet rented," began the almost unknown Tamara Grigorievna, "and as it happens they would very much like to have a Russian boarder. I'll tell you right away who they are. The name is Shchyogolev, that tells you nothing, but in Russia he was a public prosecutor, a very, very cultured and pleasant gentlemen. . . . Then there is his wife, who is also extremely nice, and a daughter from the first marriage. Now listen: they live at 15 Agamemnonstrasse, a wonderful district, in a small flat but *hoch-modern*, central heating, bath—in short, everything you could wish for. The room you'll live in is delightful, but [with a retractive intonation] it looks out onto the yard, that of course is a small minus. I'll tell you how much I paid for it, I paid thirty-five marks a month. It is quiet and has a fine

daybed. Well, there we are. What else can I tell you? I had my meals there and I must confess the food was excellent, excellent, but you must ask them the price yourself. I was on a diet. Here's what we'll do now. I have to be there in any case tomorrow morning, about half past eleven, I'm very punctual, so you come there too."

"Wait a second," said Fyodor (for whom to rise at ten was the equivalent of rising at five for anyone else). "Wait a second. I'm afraid that tomorrow . . . Perhaps it might be better if I . . ."

He wanted to say: "give you a ring," but Mme. Chernyshevski, who was sitting nearby, made such eyes that with a gulp he instantly corrected himself: "Yes, I think on the whole I can," he said without animation, "thank you, I'll come."

"Well then [in a narrative tone], it's 15, Agamemnonstrasse, third floor, with an elevator. So that's what we'll do. Until tomorrow then, I shall be very glad to see you."

"Good-by" said Fyodor Konstantinovich.

"Wait," cried Alexandra Yakovlevna, "please don't ring off."

The next morning when he arrived at the stipulated address—in an irritable mood, with a woolly brain and with only half of him functioning (as if the other half of him had still not opened on account of the earliness of the hour)—it turned out that Tamara Grigorievna not only was not there but had rung to say she could not come. He was received by Shchyogolev himself (no-one else was at home), who turned out to be a bulky, chubby man whose outline reminded one of a carp, about fifty years old, with one of those open Russian faces whose openness is almost indecent. It was a fairly full face of oval cut, with a tiny black tuft just under the lower lip. He had a remarkable hair style that was also somehow indecent: thin black hair evenly smoothed down and divided by a parting which was not quite in the middle of the head and yet not quite to one side either. Big ears, simple male eyes, a thick yellowish nose and a moist smile completed the general pleasant

impression. "Godunov-Cherdyntsev," he repeated, "of course, of course, an extremely well-known name. I once knew . . . let me see—isn't your father Oleg Kirillovich? Aha, uncle. Where's he living now? In Philadelphia? Hm, that's quite a way. Just look where we émigrés get to! Amazing. And are you in touch with him? I see, I see. Well, never put off to tomorrow what you have already done—ha-ha! Come. I'll show you your quarters."

To the right of the hallway there was a short passage immediately turning right again at a right-angle to become another embryo corridor that terminated in the half-open door of the kitchen. The left wall had two doors, the first of which, with an energetic intake of breath, Shchyogolev threw back Turning its head, there froze before us a small oblong room with ochered walls, a table by the window, a couch along one wall and a wardrobe by the other. To Fyodor, it seemed repellent, hostile, completely "unhandy" in regard to his life, as if positioned several fateful degrees out of true (with a dusty sunbeam representing the dotted line that marks the bias of a geometric figure when it is revolved) in relation to that imaginary rectangle within whose limits he might be able to sleep, read and think; but even if by a miracle he had been able to adjust his life to fit the angle of this deviant box, nevertheless its furniture, color, view onto the asphalt yard—everything about it was unendurable, and he decided at once that he would not take it.

"Well, here it is," said Shchyogolev jauntily, "and here's the bathroom next door. It needs a little cleaning up in here. Now, if you don't mind . . ." He bumped violently into Fyodor in turning around in the narrow corridor and uttering an apologetic "Och!" grasped him by the shoulder. They returned to the entrance hall. "Here is my daughter's room, here is ours," he said, pointing to two doors on the left and right. "And here's the dining room," and opening a door in the depths, he held it in that position for several seconds, as if taking a time exposure. Fyodor passed his eyes over the table, a bowl of nuts, a sideboard. . . . By

the far window, near a small bamboo table, stood a high-backed armchair: across its arms there lay in airy repose a gauze dress, pale bluish and very short (as was worn then at dances), and on the little table gleamed a silvery flower and a pair of scissors.

"That's all," said Shchyogolev, carefully closing the door, "you see—cozy, homely; everything we have is small, but we do have everything. If you wish to have your grub with us you're very welcome, we'll talk to my missus about that; between you and me she's not a bad cook. Since you're Mrs. Abramov's friend, we'll charge you the same as her, we won't ill-treat you, you'll live snug as a thug in the jug," and Shchyogolev laughed fruitily.

"Yes, I think the room will suit me," said Fyodor, trying not to look at him. "In fact, I would like to move in on Wednesday."

"Please yourself," said Shchyogolev.

Have you ever happened, reader, to feel that subtle sorrow of parting with an unloved abode? The heart does not break, as it does in parting with dear objects. The humid gaze does not wander around holding back a tear, as if it wished to carry away in it a trembling reflection of the abandoned spot; but in the best corner of our hearts we feel pity for the things which we did not bring to life with our breath, which we hardly noticed and are now leaving forever. This already dead inventory will not be resurrected later in one's memory: the bed will not follow us, shouldering its own self; the reflection in the dresser will not rise from its coffin; only the view from the window will abide for a while, like the faded photograph, fitted into a cemetery cross, of a trim-haired, steady-eyed gentleman in a starched collar. I would like to wish you good-by, but you would not even hear my greeting. Nevertheless, good-by I lived here exactly two years, thought here about many things, the shadows of my caravan passed over this wallpaper, lilies grew out of the cigarette ash on the carpet—but now the journey is over. The torrents of books have gone back to the ocean of the library. I do not know if I

shall ever read the drafts and extracts rammed under the linen in my suitcase, but I do know that I will never look in here again.

Fyodor sat on his suitcase and locked it; went around the room; gave a final check to the drawers, and found nothing: corpses do not steal. A fly climbed up the windowpane, impatiently slipped, half fell and half flew downwards, as if shaking something, and started to crawl again. The house opposite, which he had found in scaffolding the April before last, was evidently in need of repairs again now: prepared boards were stacked by the sidewalk. He carried his things out, went to say good-by to the landlady, for the first and last time shaking her hand, which turned out to be dry, strong and cold, gave her back the keys and left. The distance from the old residence to the new was about the same as, somewhere in Russia, that from Pushkin Avenue to Gogol Street.

Chapter Three

EVERY morning just after eight he was guided out of his slumber by the same sound behind the thin wall, two feet from his temple. It was the clean, round-bottomed ring of a tumbler being replaced on a glass shelf; after which the landlord's daughter cleared her throat. Then came the spasmodic *trk-trk* of a revolving cylinder, then the sound of flushed water, choking, groaning and abruptly ceasing, then the bizarre internal whine of a bath tap that finally turned into the rustle of a shower. A slip-bolt clacked and footsteps receded past his door. From an opposite direction came other footsteps, dark and heavy, with a slight shuffle: that was Marianna Nikolavna hurrying to the kitchen to get some coffee for her daughter. One could hear the gas at first refusing with noisy bursts to catch light; subdued, it flared and hissed steadily. The first footsteps returned, now heeled; in the kitchen a fast, angrily agitated conversation started up. Just as some people speak with a southern or Moscow pronunciation so did mother and daughter invariably speak to one another in the accents of a quarrel. Their voices were similar, both swarthy and smooth, but one more coarse and somehow cramped, the other freer and purer. In the rumble of the mother's there was a pleading, even a guilty pleading; in the daugh-

ter's increasingly short replies there rang hostility. To the accompaniment of this indistinct morning storm Fyodor Konstantinovich would again fall peacefully asleep.

Through his patchily thinning slumber he made out the sounds of cleaning; the wall would suddenly collapse on him: that meant a mop handle that had been insecurely leaning against his door. Once a week the janitor's wife, fat, heavily breathing, reeking of stale sweat, came with a vacuum cleaner, and then all hell broke loose, the world was shattered to bits, a hellish grinding pervaded one's very soul, destroying it, and drove Fyodor out of his bed, out of his room and out of the house. But usually, around ten o'clock, Marianna Nikolavna took her turn in the bathroom and after her came, hawking up phlegm as he went, Ivan Borisovich. He flushed the toilet as many as five times but did not use the bath, contenting himself with the murmur of the little washbasin. By half past ten everything in the house was quiet: Marianna Nikolavna had gone away to do her shopping, Shchyogolev on his shady affairs. Fyodor Konstantinovich descended into a blissful abyss where the warm remnants of his slumber mingled with a feeling of happiness, both from the previous day and still to come.

Quite often now he began the day with a poem Lying supine with the first satisfyingly tasty, large and long-lasting cigarette between his parched lips, he again after a break of almost ten years was composing that particular kind of poem of which a gift is made in the evening so as to be reflected in the wave that has carried it out He compared the structure of these verses with that of the others. The words of the others had been forgotten. Only here and there among the erased letters had rhymes been preserved, rich ones interspersed with poor ones: kiss-bliss, wind in—linden—leaves—grieves During that sixteenth summer of his life he had first taken up the serious writing of poetry; before that, except for entomological doggerel, there had been nothing. But a certain atmosphere of composition had been long known and familiar to him: at home, everyone did some scribbling—Tanya wrote in a little album with a

little key to it; Mother wrote touchingly unpretentious prose-poems about the beauty of the native weald; Father and Uncle Oleg made up occasional verses—and these occasions were not infrequent; and Aunt Ksenya—she wrote poems only in French, temperamental and "musical" ones, with a complete disregard for the subtleties of syllabic verse; her outpourings were very popular in St. Petersburg society, particularly the long poem "La Femme et la Panthère," and also a translation of Apukhtin's "A Pair of Bays"—one stanza of which went:

Le gros grec d'Odessa, le juif de Varsovie,
Le jeune lieutenant, le général âgé,
Tous ils cherchaient en elle un peu de folle vie,
Et sur son sein rêvait leur amour passager.

Finally there had been one "real" poet, Mother's cousin, Prince Volkhovskoy, who had published on velvety paper an exquisitely printed, thick, expensive volume of languorous poems *Auroras and Stars,* all in Italian viny vignettes, with a portrait photograph of the author in the front and a monstrous list of misprints at the back. The verses were broken up into departments: Nocturnes, Autumn Motifs, The Chords of Love. Most of them were emblazoned with a motto and under all there was the exact date and place: *Sorrento*, *Ai-Todor,* or *In the Train.* I do not remember anything of these pieces except the oft-repeated word "transport": which even then sounded to me like a means of moving from one place to another.

My father took little interest in poetry, making an exception only for Pushkin: he knew him as some people know the liturgy, and liked to declaim him while out walking. I sometimes think that an echo of Pushkin's "The Prophet" still vibrates to this day in some resonantly receptive Asian gully. He also quoted, I remember, the incomparable "Butterfly" by Fet, and Tyutchev's "Now the dim-blue shadows mingle"; but that which our kinsfolk liked, the watery, easily memorized poesy of the end of the last century, avidly waiting to be set to music as a cure for

verbal anemia, he ignored utterly. As to avant-garde verse, he considered it rubbish—and in his presence I did not publicize my own enthusiasms in this sphere. Once when with a smile of irony already prepared he leafed through the books of poets scattered on my desk and as luck would have it happened on the worst item by the best of them (that famous poem by Blok where there appears an impossible, unbearable *dzhentelmen* representing Edgar Poe, and where *kovyor,* carpet, is made to rhyme with the English "Sir" transliterated as *syor*), I was so annoyed that I quickly pushed Severyanin's *The Thunder-Bubbling Cup* into his hand so that he could better unburden his soul upon it In general I considered that if he would forget for the nonce the kind of poetry I was silly enough to call "classicism" and tried without prejudice to grasp what it was I loved so much, he would have understood the new charm that had appeared in the features of Russian poetry, a charm that I sensed even in its most absurd manifestations. But when today I tote up what has remained to me of this new poetry I see that very little has survived, and what has is precisely a natural continuation of Pushkin, while the motley husk, the wretched sham, the masks of mediocrity and the stilts of talent—everything that my love once forgave or saw in a special light (and that seemed to my father to be the true face of innovation—"the mug of modernism" as he expressed it), is now so old-fashioned, so forgotten as even Karamzin's verses are not forgotten; and when on someone else's shelf I come across this or that collection of poems which had once lived with me as brother, I feel in them only what my father then felt without actually knowing them His mistake was not that he ran down all "modern poetry" indiscriminately, but that he refused to detect in it the long, life-giving ray of his favorite poet

I met her in June 1916 She was twenty-three. Her husband, a distant relative of ours, was at the front She lived in a small villa inside the boundaries of our estate and often used to visit us. Because of her I almost forgot but-

terflies and completely overlooked the revolution. In the winter of 1917 she went away to Novorossisk—and it was only in Berlin that I accidentally heard about her terrible death. She was a thin little thing, with chestnut hair combed high, a gay look in her big black eyes, dimples on her pale cheeks, and a tender mouth which she made up out of a flacon of fragrant ruby-red liquid by putting the glass stopper to her lips. In all her ways there was something I found lovable to the point of tears, something indefinable at the time, but now appearing to me as a kind of pathetic insouciance She was not intelligent, she was poorly educated and banal, that is, your exact opposite . . . no, no, I do not mean at all that I loved her more than you, or that those assignations were happier than my evening meetings with you . . . but all her shortcomings were concealed in such a tide of fascination, tenderness and grace, such enchantment flowed from her most fleeting, irresponsible word, that I was prepared to look at her and listen to her eternally—but what would happen now if she were resurrected—I don't know, you should not ask stupid questions. In the evenings I used to see her home. Those walks will come in handy sometime. In her bedroom there was a little picture of the Tsar's family and a Turgenevian odor of heliotrope. I used to return long after midnight (my tutor, fortunately, had gone back to England), and I shall never forget that feeling of lightness, pride, rapture and wild night hunger (I particularly yearned for curds-and-whey with black bread) as I walked along our faithfully and even fawningly soughing avenue toward the dark house (only Mother had a light on) and heard the barking of the watchdogs. It was then also that my versificatory illness began.

At times I would be sitting at lunch, seeing nothing, my lips moving—and to my neighbor who had asked for the sugar bowl I would pass my glass or a napkin ring Despite my inexperienced desire to transpose into verse the murmur of love filling me (well do I remember Uncle Oleg saying that if he were to publish a volume of poetry he

would certainly call it *Heart Murmur*), I had already rigged up my own, albeit poor and primitive, wordsmithy; thus, in selecting adjectives, I was already aware that ones like "innumerable" or "intangible" would simply and conveniently fill the yawning gap, which was longing to sing, from the caesura to the word closing the line ("For we shall dream innumerable dreams"); and again that for this last word one could take an additional adjective, of only two syllables, so as to combine it with the long centerpiece ("Of loveliness intangible and tender"), a melodic formula which, by the way, has had a quite disastrous effect on Russian, as well as on French poetry. I knew that handy adjectives of the amphibrachic type (a trisyllable that one visualizes in the shape of a sofa with three cushions—the middle one dented) were legion in Russian—and how many such "dejécted," "enchánted" and "rebéllious" I wasted; that we had also plenty of trochees ("ténder"), but far fewer dactyls ("sórrowful"), and these somehow all stood in profile; that finally anapaestic and iambic adjectives were on the rare side, and in addition always rather dull and inflexible, like "incompléte" or "forlórn" I knew further that great long ones like "incomprehénsible" and "infinitésimal' would come into the tetrameter bringing with them their own orchestras, and that the combination "unwanted and misunderstood" gave a certain moiré quality to the line; look at it this way—it is an amphibrach, and that way—an iamb. A little later Andrey Bely's monumental research on "half stresses" (the "comp" and the "ble" in the line "Incomprehensible desires") hypnotized me with its system of graphically marking off and calculating these scuds, so that I immediately reread all my old tetrameters from this new point of view and was terribly pained by the paucity of modulations. When plotted, their diagrams proved to be plain and gappy, showing none of those rectangles and trapeziums that Bely had found for the tetrameters of great poets, whereupon for the space of almost a whole year—an evil and sinful year—I tried to

write with the aim of producing the most complicated and rich scud-scheme possible:

> In miserable meditations,
> And aromatically dark,
> Full of interconverted patience,
> Sighs the semidenuded park.

and so on for half-a-dozen strophes: the tongue stumbled but one's honor was saved. When graphically expressed by joining the "half-stresses" ("ra," "med," "ar," "cal," etc.), in the verses and from one verse to another, this monster's rhythmic structure gave rise to something in the nature of that wobbly tower of coffeepots, baskets, trays and vases which a circus clown balances on a stick, until he runs into the barrier of the arena when everything slowly leans over, the nearest spectators (screaming horribly) but on falling turns out to be safely strung on a cord.

As a result, probably, of the weak motive power of my little lyrical rollers, verbs and other parts of speech interested me less. Not so with questions of meter and rhythm. Overcoming a natural preference for iambics, I dangled after ternary meters; later on, departures from meter fascinated me. That was the time when Balmont in his poem beginning "I will be reckless, I will be daring" launched that artificial iambic tetrameter with the bump of an extra syllable after the second foot, in which, as far as I know, not a single good poem was ever written. I would give this prancing hunchback a sunset to carry or a boat and was amazed that the former faded and the latter sank. Things went easier with the dreamy stutter of Blok's rhythms, but as soon as I began to use them my verse was imperceptibly infiltrated by stylized medievalizing—blue page-boys, monks, princesses—similar to the way that in a German tale the shadow of Bonaparte visits the antiquary Stolz at night to look for the ghost of its tricorn.

As my hunt for them progressed, rhymes settled down into a practical system somewhat on the order of a card

index. They were distributed in little families—rhyme-clusters, rhymescapes. *Letuchiy* (flying) immediately grouped *tuchi* (clouds) over the *kruchi* (steeps) of the *zhguchey* (burning) desert and of *neminuchey* (inevitable) fate. *Nebosklon* (sky) let the muse onto the *balkon* (balcony) and showed her a *klyon* (maple). *Tsvety* (flowers) and *ty* (thou) summoned *mechty* (fancies) in the midst of *temnoty* (darkness). *Svechi, plechi, vstrechi,* and *rechi* (tapers, shoulders, meetings, and speeches) created the old-world atmosphere of a ball at the Congress of Vienna or on the town governor's birthday *Glaza* (eyes) shone blue in the company of *biryuza* (turquoise), *groza* (thunderstorm), and *strekoza* (dragonfly), and it was better not to get involved in the series. *Derevya* (trees) found themselves dully paired with *kochevya* (nomad encampments) as happens in the game in which one has to collect cards with the names of cities, with only two representing Sweden (but a dozen in the case of France!) *Veter* (wind) had no mate, except for a not very attractive setter running about in the distance, but by shifting into the genitive, one could get words ending in "meter" to perform (*vetra-geometra*). There were also certain treasured freaks, rhymes to which, like rare stamps in an album, were represented by blanks. Thus it took me a long time to discover that *ametistovyy* (amethystine) could be rhymed with *perelistyvay* (turn the pages), with *neistovyy* (furioso), and with the genitive case of an utterly unsuitable *pristav* (police constable) In short, it was a beautifully labeled collection that I had always close to hand.

I do not doubt that even then, at the time of that ugly, crippling school (which I would hardly have bothered with at all were I a typical poet who never fell for the blandishments of harmonious prose) I nevertheless knew true inspiration The agitation which seized me, swiftly covered me with an icy sheet, squeezed my joints and jerked at my fingers The lunatic wandering of my thought which by unknown means found the door in a thousand leading into the noisy night of the garden, the expansion and contrac-

tion of the heart, now as vast as the starry sky and then as small as a droplet of mercury, the opening arms of a kind of inner embracement, classicism's sacred thrill, mutterings, tears—all this was genuine. But at that moment, in a hasty and clumsy attempt to resolve the agitation, I clutched at the first hackneyed words available, at their ready-made linkages, so that as soon as I had embarked on what I thought to be creation, on what should have been the expression, the living connection between my divine excitement and my human world, everything expired in a fatal gust of words, whereas I continued to rotate epithets and adjust rhymes without noticing the split, the debasement and the betrayal—like a man relating his dream (like any dream infinitely free and complex, but clotting like blood upon waking up), who unnoticed by himself and his listeners rounds it out, cleans it up and dresses it in the fashion of hackneyed reality, and if he begins thus. "I dreamt that I was sitting in my room," monstrously vulgarizes the dream's devices by taking it for granted that the room had been furnished exactly the same as his room in real life.

Farewell forever: on a winter day, with large snowflakes falling since morning, drifting anyhow—vertically, slantwise, even upwards. Her big arctics and tiny muff. She was taking away with her absolutely everything—including the park where they used to meet in summer. There remained only his rhymed inventory plus the briefcase under his arm, the shabby briefcase of an upper-former who had skipped school. An odd constraint, the desire to say something important, silence, vague insignificant words Love, to put it simply, repeats at the last parting the musical theme of shyness that precedes its first avowal The reticulate touch of her salty lips through the veil. At the station there was vile animal bustle: this was the time when the black and white seeds of the flower of happiness, sunshine and freedom were being liberally sown. Now it has grown up. Russia is populated with sunflowers. This is the largest, most fat-faced and stupidest of flowers

Poems: about parting, about death, about the past. It is

impossible to define (but it seems this happened abroad) the exact period of change in my attitude to writing poetry, when I became sick of the workshop, the classification of words and the collection of rhymes. But how excruciatingly difficult it was to break, scatter and forget all that: Faulty habits clung firmly, words accustomed to go together did not want to be uncoupled. In themselves they were neither bad nor good, but their combination in groups, the mutual guarantee of rhymes, the rank-grown rhythms—all this made them foul, hideous and dead. To consider himself a mediocrity was hardly any better than believing he was a genius. Fyodor doubted the first and conceded the second, but more important, strove not to surrender to the fiendish despair of a blank sheet. Since there were things he wanted to express just as naturally and unrestrainedly as the lungs want to expand, hence words suitable for breathing ought to exist. The oft repeated complaints of poets that, alas, no words are available, that words are pale corpses, that words are incapable of expressing our thingummy-bob feelings (and to prove it a torrent of trochaic hexameters is set loose) seemed to him just as senseless as the staid conviction of the eldest inhabitant of a mountain hamlet that yonder mountain has never been climbed by anyone and never will be; one fine, cold morning a long lean Englishman appears—and cheerfully scrambles up to the top.

The first feeling of liberation stirred in him when he was working on the little volume *Poems*, published two years ago now. It had remained in his consciousness as a pleasant exercise One or two out of those fifty octaves, it was true, he was now ashamed of—for example that one about the bicycle, or the dentist—but on the other hand, there were some vivid and genuine bits. the lost and found ball, for instance, had come out very nicely, and the rhythm of its last two lines still continued to sing in his ear with the same inspired expressiveness as before. He had published the book at his own expense (having sold an accidental survivor of his former wealth, a flat, gold cigarette case with the date of a distant summer night scratched on it—oh that

creak of her wicket gate wet with dew!) and out of the total of five hundred copies printed, four hundred and twenty-nine still lay, dusty and uncut, forming a neat mesa in the distributor's warehouse. Nineteen had been presented to different people, and one he had kept himself. Sometimes he wondered about the exact identity of the fifty-one who had bought his book. He imagined a roomful of these people (like a meeting of stockholders—"readers of Godunov-Cherdyntsev") and they were all alike, with thoughtful eyes and a small white volume in their affectionate hands. He learned for sure the fate of only one copy: it had been bought two years ago by Zina Mertz.

He lay and smoked, and gently composed, reveling in the womblike warmth of the bed, the quietness of the flat and the lazy passage of time. Marianna Nikolavna would not be returning for a while and dinner was not earlier than one fifteen. During the past three months the room had been completely domesticated and its movement in space now coincided exactly with that of his life. The ring of a hammer, the hiss of a pump, the roar of an engine being checked, German bursts of German voices—all this humdrum complex of noises coming every morning from left of the yard, where there were garages and car workshops, had long since become familiar and harmless—a barely noticeable pattern in the stillness and not a violation of it. He could touch the little table by the window with his toe, if he stretched it from under the army blanket, and with a sideways projection of his arm he could reach the wardrobe by the left wall (which, by the way, sometimes for no reason, suddenly opened with the officious look of some fool of an actor who has come onto the stage at the wrong time). On the table stood the Leshino photograph, a bottle of ink, a lamp beneath cloudy glass and a saucer with traces of jam on it, reviews were lying around, the Soviet *Krasnaya Nov'*, and the émigré *Sovremennye Zapiski*, and a little volume of verse by Koncheyev, *Communication*, which had only just come out Collapsed on the rug by his couch were yesterday's paper and an émigré edition of *Dead Souls*.

None of this did he see for the moment, but it was all there: a small society of objects schooled to become invisible and in this finding their purpose, which they could only fulfil through the constancy of their miscellaneousness. His euphoria was all-pervading—a pulsating mist that suddenly began to speak with a human voice. Nothing in the world could be better than these moments. Love only what is fanciful and rare; what from the distance of a dream steals through; what knaves condemn to death and fools can't bear. To fiction be as to your country true. Now is our time. Stray dogs and cripples are alone awake. Mild is the summer night. A car speeds by: Forever that last car has taken the last banker out of sight. Near that streetlight veined lime-leaves masquerade in chrysoprase with a translucent gleam. Beyond that gate lies Baghdad's crooked shade, and yon star sheds on Pulkovo its beam. Oh, swear to me—

From the hall came the jangling peal of the telephone By tacit consent Fyodor attended to it when the others were out. And what if I don't get up now? The ringing went on and on, with brief pauses to catch its breath. It did not wish to die; it had to be killed. Unable to hold out, with a curse Fyodor gained the hall phantom-fast. A Russian voice asked irritably who was speaking. Fyodor recognized it instantly: it was an unknown person—by the whim of chance a fellow countryman—who already the day before had got the wrong number and now again, because of the similarity of the numbers, had blundered into the wrong connection. "For Christ's sake go away," said Fyodor and hung up with disgusted haste. He visited the bathroom for a moment, drank a cup of cold coffee in the kitchen, and dashed back into bed. What shall I call you? Half-Mnemo-*syne?* There's a half-shim*mer* in your surname too. In dark Berlin, it is so strange to me to roam, oh, my half-fantasy, with you A bench stands under the translucent tree. Shivers and sobs reanimate you there, and all life's wonder in your gaze I see, and see the pale fair radiance of your hair. In honor of your lips when they kiss mine I

might devise a metaphor some time: Tibetan mountain-snows, their glancing shine, and a hot spring near flowers touched with rime. Our poor nocturnal property—that wet asphaltic gloss, that fence and that street light—upon the ace of fancy let us set to win a world of beauty from the night Those are not clouds—but star-high mountain spurs; not lamplit blinds—but camplight on a tent! O swear to me that while the heartblood stirs, you will be true to what we shall invent.

At midday the peck of a key (now we switch to the prose-rhythm of Bely) was heard, and the lock reacted in character, clacking: that was Marianna (stopgap) Nikolavna home from the market; with a ponderous step and a sickening swish of her mackintosh she carried a thirty-pound netful of shopping past his door and into the *kitchen. Muse of Russian prose-rhythm! Say farewell* forever to the cabbage dactylics of the author of *Moscow*. All feeling of comfort was now gone. Of the morning capaciousness of time nothing remained. The bed had turned into a parody of a bed. In the sounds of dinner being prepared in the kitchen there was an unpleasant reproach, and the perspective of washing and shaving seemed as flat and impossible as the perspective of the early Italians. And with this, too, you will have to part some day.

A quarter past twelve, twenty past twelve, half past . . . He allowed himself one last cigarette in the tenacious although already tedious warmth of the bed The anachronism of his pillow became more and more obvious. Without finishing his cigarette he got up and passed immediately from a world of many interesting dimensions into one that was cramped and demanding, with a different pressure, which instantly caused his body to tire and his head to ache; into a world of cold water: the hot was not running today.

A poetic hangover, dejection, the "sad animal" . . . The day before he had forgotten to rinse his safety razor, between its teeth there was stony foam, the blade had rusted—and he had no other. A pale self-portrait looked

out of the mirror with the serious eyes of all self-portraits. On a tenderly itchy spot to one side of his chin, among the hairs which had grown up overnight (how many yards of them shall I cut off in my life?), there had appeared a yellow-headed pimple which instantly became the hub of Fyodor's existence, a rallying point for all the unpleasant feelings now trekking in from different parts of his being. He squeezed it out—although he knew it would later swell up three times as big. How awful all this was. Through the cold shaving-soap foam pierced the little red eye: *L'oeil regardait Cain*. Meanwhile the blade had no effect on the hairs, and the feel of the bristles when he checked them with his fingers produced a sense of hellish hopelessness. Drops of blood dew appeared in the vicinity of his Adam's apple but the hairs were still there. The Steppe of Despair. On top of everything else the bathroom was on the darkish side and even if he had put on the light the immortelle-like yellowness of daytime electricity would have been no help at all. Finishing his shave anyhow, he squeamishly climbed into the bath and groaned under the icy impact of the shower; then he made a mistake with the towels and thought miserably that he would be smelling all day of Marianna Nikolavna. The skin of his face smarted, revoltingly chafish, with one particularly hot little ember on the side of his chin. Suddenly the door handle of the bathroom was jerked vigorously (that was Shchyogolev returning). Fyodor Konstantinovich waited for the footfalls to recede, and then popped back into his room.

Soon afterwards he entered the dining room. Marianna Nikolavna was ladling out the soup He kissed her rough hand Her daughter, who was just back from work, came to the table with slow steps, worn out and seemingly dazed by her office; she sat down with graceful languor—a cigarette in her long fingers, powder on her lashes, a turquoise silk jumper, short-cut fair hair brushed back from the temple, sullenness, silence, ash. Shchyogolev gulped down a dram of vodka, tucked his napkin into his collar and began to slop up his soup, looking over his spoon affably but cau-

tiously at his stepdaughter. She was slowly mixing a white exclamation mark of sour cream into her borshch, but then, shrugging her shoulders, she pushed her plate away. Marianna Nikolavna, who had been bloomily watching her, threw her napkin on the table and left the dining room.

"Come on, eat, Aida," said Shchyogolev, thrusting out his wet lips. Without a word of reply, as if he was not there—only the nostrils of her narrow nose quivered—she turned in her chair, easily and naturally twisted her long body, obtained an ashtray from the sideboard behind her, placed it by her plate and flicked some ash into it. Marianna Nikolavna, with a hurt look beglooming her ample crudely madeup face, returned from the kitchen. The daughter placed her left elbow on the table and slightly leaning on it slowly began her soup.

"Well, Fyodor Konstantinovich," began Shchyogolev, having satisfied his first hunger, "it seems matters are coming to a head! A complete break with England, and Hinchuk walloped! You know it's already beginning to smell of something serious. You remember, only the other day I said Koverda's shot was the first signal! War! You have to be very, very naïve to deny it's inevitable. Judge for yourself, in the Far East, Japan cannot put up with . . ."

And Shchyogolev launched on a discussion of politics. Like many unpaid windbags he thought that he could combine the reports he read in the papers by paid windbags into an orderly scheme, upon following which a logical and sober mind (in this case his mind) could with no effort explain and foresee a multitude of world events. The names of countries and of their leading representatives became in his hands something in the nature of labels for more or less full but essentially identical vessels, whose contents he poured this way and that. France was AFRAID of something or other and therefore would never ALLOW it. England was AIMING at something. This statesman CRAVED a rapprochement, while the one wanted to increase his PRESTIGE. Someone was PLOTTING and someone was STRIVING for

something. In short, the world Shchyogolev created came out as some kind of collection of limited, humorless, faceless and abstract bullies, and the more brains, cunning and circumspection he found in their mutual activities the more stupid, vulgar and simple his world became. It used to be quite awesome when he came across another similar lover of political prognoses. For example, there was a Colonel Kasatkin, who used to come sometimes to dinner, and then Shchyogolev's England clashed not with another Shchyogolev country but with Kasatkin's England, equally nonexistent, so that in a certain sense international wars turned into civil wars, although the warring sides existed on different levels which could never come into contact with one another. At present, while listening to his landlord, Fyodor was amazed by the family likeness between the countries mentioned by Shchyogolev and the various parts of Shchyogolev's own body: thus "France" corresponded to his warningly raised eyebrows; some kind of "limitrophes" to the hairs in his nostrils, some "Polish corridor" or other went along his esophagus; "Danzig" was the click of his teeth; and Russia was Shchyogolev's bottom.

He talked all through the next two courses (goulash, kissel) and after that, picking his teeth with a broken match, went to take a nap. Marianna Nikolavna busied herself with the dishes before doing the same. Her daughter, having not uttered a single word, went back to her office.

Fyodor had only just managed to clear the bedclothes from the couch before a pupil arrived, the son of an émigré dentist, a fat, pale youth in horn-rimmed spectacles, with a fountain pen in his breast pocket. Attending, as he did, a Berlin high school, the poor boy was so steeped in the local habitus that even in English he made the same ineradicable mistakes as any skittle-headed German would have made. There was no force on earth, for example, which could have stopped him using the past continuous instead of the simple past, and this endowed every of his accidental activities of the day before with a kind of idiotic perma-

nence. Equally stubbornly he handled the English "also" like the German *"also,"* and in overcoming the thorny ending of the word "clothes" he invariably added a superfluous sibilant syllable ("clothes-zes"), as if skidding after having cleared an obstacle. At the same time he expressed himself fairly freely in English and had only sought the aid of a coach because he wanted to get the highest mark in the final examination. He was self-satisfied, discursive, obtuse and germanically ignorant; i.e., he treated everything he did not know with skepticism. Firmly believing that the humorous side of things had long since been worked out in the proper place for it (the back page of a Berlin illustrated weekly), he never laughed, or limited himself to a condescending snicker. The only thing that could just barely amuse him was a story about some ingenious financial operation. His whole philosophy of life had been reduced to the simplest proposition: the poor man is unhappy, the rich man is happy. This legalized happiness was playfully put together to the accompaniment of first-class dance music, out of various items of technical luxury. For the lesson he always did his best to come a little before the hour and tried to leave a little after it.

Hurrying to his next trial, Fyodor left together with him, and the latter, accompanying him as far as the corner, endeavored to collect a few more English expressions gratis, but Fyodor, with dry glee, lapsed into Russian. They parted at the crossroads. It was a windy and shabby crossroads, not quite grown to the rank of a square although there was a church, and a public garden, and a corner pharmacy, and a public convenience with thujas around it, and even a triangular island with a kiosk, at which tram conductors regaled themselves with milk A multitude of streets diverging in all directions, jumping out from behind corners and skirting the above-mentioned places of prayer and refreshment turned it all into one of those schematic little pictures on which are depicted for the edification of beginning motorists all the elements of the city, all the

possibilities for them to collide. To the right one saw the gates of a tram depot with three beautiful birches standing out against its cement background, and if, say, some absentminded tramdriver forgot to pause by the kiosk three yards before the lawful tram stop (a woman with parcels invariably making fussily to get off and being held back by everybody) in order to throw the switch with the point of his iron rod (alas, such absentmindedness almost never occurred), the tram would have solemnly turned in under the glass dome where it spent the night and was serviced. The church which loomed to the left was encircled with a low belt of ivy; in the parterre surrounding it grew several dark bushes of rhododendron with purple flowers, and at night one used to see a mysterious man here with a mysterious lantern looking for earthworms on the turf—for his birds? for fishing? Opposite the church across the street, beneath the radiance of a lawn-sprinkler that waltzed on one spot with the ghost of a rainbow in its dewy arms, was the green oblong lawn of the public garden, with young trees along either side (a silver fir among them) and a pi-shaped walk, in whose shadiest corner there was a sandpit for children; but *we* touch this kind of rich sand only when we are buying someone we know. Behind the garden there was an abandoned soccer field, along which Fyodor walked toward the Kurfürstendamm. The green of the lindens, the black of the asphalt, the truck tires leaning against the railings by the shop for motorcar accessories, the beaming young bride on a poster displaying a packet of margarine, the blue of a tavern sign, the gray of house fronts getting older as they got closer to the avenue—all this flickered by him for the hundredth time As always, when a few steps from the Kurfürstendamm, he saw his bus sweep across the vista in front of him: the stop was immediately around the corner, but Fyodor did not get there in time and was forced to wait for the next one. Over the entrance to a cinema a black giant cut out of cardboard had been erected, with turned-out feet, the blotch of a mustache on his white face beneath

a bowler hat, and a bent cane in his hand. In wicker armchairs on the terrace of a neighboring café businessmen sprawled in identical poses with their hands identically gabled in front of them, all very similar to one another as regards snouts and ties but probably varied in the extent of their solvency; and by the curb stood a small car with a heavily damaged wing, broken windows and a bloody handkerchief on the running board; a half-a-dozen people still loafed around, gaping at it. Everything was sun mottled; a puny old man with a dyed little beard and wearing cloth spats sat sunning himself on a green bench, with his back to the traffic, while opposite him across the sidewalk, an elderly, rosy-faced beggar woman with legs cut off at the pelvis was set down like a bust at the foot of a wall and was selling paradoxical shoelaces. Between the houses could be seen a vacant lot and on it something was modestly and mysteriously blooming; beyond it the continuous slaty-black backs of houses that seemed to have turned to leave, carried strange, attractive and seemingly completely autonomous whitish designs, reminding one not quite of the canals on Mars and not quite of something very distant and half-forgotten, like an accidental expression from a once-heard fairy tale or old scenery for some unknown play.

Down the helical stairs of the bus that drew up came a pair of charming silk legs: we know of course that this has been worn threadbare by the efforts of a thousand male writers, but nevertheless down they came, these legs—and deceived: the face was revolting. Fyodor climbed aboard, and the conductor, on the open top deck, smote its plated side with his palm to tell the driver he could move on. Along this side and along the toothpaste advertisement upon it swished the tips of soft maple twigs—and it would have been pleasant to look down from above on the gliding street ennobled by perspective, if it were not for the everlasting, chilly thought: there he is, a special, rare and as yet undescribed and unnamed variant of man, and he is occupied with God knows what, rushing from lesson to lesson, wasting his youth on a boring and empty task, on the

mediocre teaching of foreigh languages—when he has his own language. out of which he can make anything he likes—a midge, a mammoth, a thousand different clouds. What he should be really teaching was that mysterious and refined thing which he alone—out of ten thousand, a hundred thousand, perhaps even a million men—knew how to teach. for example—multilevel thinking: you look at a person and you see him as clearly as if he were fashioned of glass and you were the glass blower, while at the same time without in the least impinging upon that clarity you notice some trifle on the side—such as the similarity of the telephone receiver's shadow to a huge, slightly crushed ant, and (all this simultaneously) the convergence is joined by a third thought—the memory of a sunny evening at a Russian small railway station; i e , images having no rational connection with the conversation you are carrying on while your mind runs around the outside of your own words and along the inside of those of your interlocutor. Or: a piercing pity—for the tin box in a waste patch, for the cigarette card from the series *National Costumes* trampled in the mud, for the poor, stray word repeated by the kindhearted, weak, loving creature who has just been scolded for nothing—for all the trash of life which by means of a momentary alchemic distillation—the "royal experiment"—is turned into something valuable and eternal. Or else: the constant feeling that our days here are only pocket money, farthings clinking in the dark, and that somewhere is stocked the real wealth, from which life should know how to get dividends in the shape of dreams, tears of happiness, distant mountains. All this and much more (beginning with the very rare and painful so-called "sense of the starry sky," mentioned it seems in only one treatise [Parker's *Travels of the Spirit*], and ending with professional subtleties in the sphere of serious literature), he would have been able to teach, and teach well, to anyone who wanted it, but no one wanted it—and no one could, but it was a pity, he would have charged a hundred marks an hour, the same as certain professors of music. And at the same time he found

it amusing to refute himself: all this was nonsense, the shadows of nonsense, presumptuous dreams. I am simply a poor young Russian selling the surplus from a gentleman's upbringing, while scribbling verses in my spare time, that's the total of my little immortality. But even this shade of multifaceted thought, this play of the mind with its own self, had no prospective pupils.

The bus rolled on—and presently he arrived at his destination—the place of a lone and lonesome young woman, very attractive in spite of her freckles, always wearing a black dress opened at the neck and with lips like sealing-wax on a letter in which there was nothing. She continually looked at Fyodor with pensive curiosity, not only taking no interest in the remarkable novel by Stevenson which he had been reading with her for the past three months (and before that they had read Kipling at the same rate), but also not understanding a single sentence, and noting down words as you would note down the address of someone you knew you would never visit. Even now—or more exactly, precisely now and with greater agitation than before, Fyodor (although in love with another who was incomparable in fascination and intelligence) wondered what would happen if he placed his palm on this slightly trembling little hand with the sharp fingernails, lying so invitingly close—and because he knew what would happen then his heart suddenly began to thump and his lips immediately went dry; at this point, however, he was involuntarily sobered by a certain intonation of hers, her little laugh, the smell of that certain scent which somehow was always used by the very women who liked him, although to him this dullish, sweetish-brown smell was unbearable. She was a worthless, cunning woman with a sluggish soul; but even now, when the lesson was over and he had gone out into the street, he was seized by a vague feeling of annoyance; he could imagine much better than he had just been able to, in her presence, how gaily and yieldingly her compact little body would probably have responded to everything, and with painful vividness he saw in an imaginary

mirror his hand on her back and her smooth auburn head thrown back, and then the mirror significantly emptied and he experienced that most trivial of all feelings on earth: the stab of a missed opportunity.

No, that was not so—he had missed nothing. The sole joy of these unrealizable embraces was their ease of evocation. During the past ten years of lonely and restrained youth, living on a cliff where there was always a bit of snow and from where it was a long way down to the little brewery town at the foot of the mountain, he had become accustomed to the thought that between the deceit of casual love and the sweetness of its temptation there was a void, a gap in life, an absence of any real action on his part, so that on occasion, when he looked at a passing girl, he imagined simultaneously both the stupendous possibility of happiness and repugnance for its inevitable imperfection—charging this one instant with a romantic image, but diminishing its triptych by the middle section. He knew therefore that their reading of Stevenson would never be interrupted by a Dantean pause, knew that if such a break should take place he would not experience a thing, except a devastating chill because the demands of the imagination were unfulfillable, and because the vacuousness of a gaze, forgiven for the sake of beautiful, moist eyes, inevitably corresponded to a defect as yet concealed—the vacuous expression of breasts, which it was impossible to forgive. But sometimes he envied the simple love life of other men and the way they probably had of whistling while taking off their shoes.

Crossing Wittenberg Square where, as in a color film, roses were quivering in the breeze around an antique flight of stairs which led down to an underground station, he walked toward the Russian bookshop: between lessons there was a chink of spare time. As always happened when he came to this street (beginning under the auspices of a huge department store that sold all forms of local bad taste, and ending after several crossroads in burgherish calm, with poplar shadows on the asphalt, all chalked over by hopscotchers) he met an elderly, morbidly embittered St.

Petersburg writer who wore an overcoat in summer to hide the shabbiness of his suit, a dreadfully skinny man with bulging dark brown eyes, wrinkles of fastidious distaste around his apish mouth, and one long, curved hair growing out of a big black pore on his broad nose—a detail which attracted Fyodor Konstantinovich's attention much more than the conversation of this clever schemer, who embarked immediately he met anyone upon something in the nature of a fable, a long farfetched anecdote of yore, which turned out to be merely a prelude to some amusing gossip about a mutual acquaintance. Fyodor had barely got rid of him when he caught sight of two more writers, a good-naturedly gloomy Muscovite whose carriage and aspect were somewhat reminiscent of the Napoleon of the island period, and a satirical poet from the Berlin Russian-émigré paper, a frail little man with a kindly wit and a quiet, hoarse voice. These two, like their predecessor, invariably turned up in this region, which they used for leisurely walks, rich in encounters, so that it seemed as if on this German street there had encroached the vagabond phantom of a Russian boulevard, or as if on the contrary a street in Russia, with several natives taking the air, swarmed with the pale ghosts of innumerable foreigners flickering among those natives like a familiar and barely noticeable hallucination. They chatted about the writer just encountered, and Fyodor sailed on. After a few steps he noticed Koncheyev reading on the stroll the feuilleton at the bottom of the Paris Russian-émigré paper, with a marvelous angelic smile on his round face. The engineer Kern came out of a Russian food shop, cautiously thrusting a small parcel into the briefcase pressed against his chest, and on a cross street (like the confluence of people in a dream or in the last chapter of Turgenev's *Smoke*) he caught a glimpse of Marianna Nikolavna Shchyogolev with some other lady, mustachioed and very stout, who perhaps was Mme. Abramov. Immediately after that Alexander Yakovlevich Chernyshevski cut across the street—no, a mistake—a stranger not even very like him.

Fyodor Konstantinovich reached the bookshop. In the window he could see, among the zigzags, cogs and numerals of Soviet cover designs (this was the time when the fashion there was to have titles like *Third Love, The Sixth Sense* and *Point Seventeen*), several new émigré publications: a corpulent new romance by General Kachurin, *The Red Princess,* Koncheyev's *Communication,* the pure white paperbacks of two venerable novelists, an anthology of recitable poetry published in Riga, the minute, palm-sized volume of a young poetess, a handbook *What a Driver Should Know,* and the last work of Dr. Utin, *The Foundations of a Happy Marriage.* There were also several old St Petersburg engravings—in one of which a mirror-like transposition had put the rostral column on the wrong side of the neighboring buildings.

The owner of the shop was not there: he had gone to the dentist's and his place was being taken by a rather accidental young lady reading a Russian translation of Kellerman's *The Tunnel* in a fairly uncomfortable pose in the corner. Fyodor Konstantinovich approached the table where the émigré periodicals were displayed. He unfolded the literary number of the Paris Russian *News* and with a chill of sudden excitement he saw that the feuilleton by Christopher Mortus was devoted to *Communication.* "What if he demolishes it?" Fyodor managed to think with a mad hope, already, however, hearing in his ears not the melody of detraction but the sweeping roar of deafening praise. He greedily began to read.

"I do not remember who said—perhaps Rozanov said it somewhere," began Mortus stealthily; and citing first this unauthentic quotation and then some thought expressed by somebody in a Paris café after someone's lecture, he began to narrow these artificial circles around Koncheyev's *Communication,* but even so, to the very end he never touched the center, but only directed now and then a mesmeric gesture toward it from the circumference—and again revolved. The result was something in the nature of those black spirals on cardboard circles which are everlastingly

spinning in the windows of Berlin ice-cream parlors in a crazy effort to turn into bull's-eyes.

It was a venomously disdainful "dressing down" without a single remark to the point, without a single example—and not so much the critic's words as his whole manner made a pitiful and dubious phantom out of a book which Mortus could not fail to have read with delight and from which he avoided quoting in order not to damage himself with the disparity between what he wrote and what he was writing about; the whole review seemed to be a séance for the summoning of a spirit which is announced in advance to be, if not a fraud, at least a delusion of the senses. "These poems," ended Mortus, "induce in the reader an indefinite but insuperable repulsion People friendly to Koncheyev's talent will probably think them enchanting. We shall not quarrel—perhaps this is really so. But in our difficult times with their new responsibilities, when the very air is imbued with a subtle moral *angoisse* (an awareness of which is the infallible mark of 'genuineness' in a contemporary poet), abstract and melodious little pieces about dreamy visions are incapable of seducing anyone. And in truth it is with a kind of joyous relief that one passes from them to any kind of 'human document,' to what one can read 'between the words' in certain Soviet writers (granted even without talent), to an artless and sorrowful confession, to a private letter dictated by emotion and despair."

At first Fyodor Konstantinovich felt an acute almost physical pleasure from this article, but it immediately dispersed and was replaced by a queer sensation, as if he had been taking part in a sly, evil business. He recalled Koncheyev's smile of a moment ago—over these very lines, of course—and it occurred to him that a similar smile might apply to him, Godunov-Cherdyntsev, whom envy had leagued with the critic. Here he recalled that Koncheyev himself in his critical reviews had more than once—from the heights and in fact just as unscrupulously—stung Mortus (who was, by the way, in private life, a woman of

middle age, the mother of a family, who in her youth had published excellent poems in the St. Petersburg review *Apollo* and who now lived modestly two steps from the grave of Marie Bashkirtsev, suffering from an incurable eye illness which endowed Mortus' every line with a kind of tragic value). And when Fyodor realized the infinitely flattering hostility of this article he felt disappointed that no one wrote about *him* like that.

He also looked through a little illustrated weekly published by Russian émigrés in Warsaw and found a review on the same subject, but of a completely different cut. It was a *critique-bouffe*. The local Valentin Linyov, who from issue to issue used to pour out his formless, reckless, and not altogether grammatical literary impressions, was famous not only for not being able to make sense of the book he reviewed but also for not having, apparently, read it to the end. Jauntily using the author as a springboard, carried away by his own paraphrase, extracting isolated phrases in support of his incorrect conclusions, misunderstanding the initial pages and thereafter energetically pursuing a false trail, he would make his way to the penultimate chapter in the blissful state of a passenger who still does not know (and in his case never finds out) that he has boarded the wrong train. It invariably happened that having leafed blindly through a long novel or a short story (size played no part in it) he would provide the book with his own ending—usually exactly opposite to the author's intention. In other words, if, say, Gogol had been a contemporary and Linyov were writing about him, Linyov would remain firmly of the innocent conviction that Hlestakov was indeed the inspector-general. But when, as now, he wrote about poetry, he artlessly employed the device of so-called "inter-quotational footbridges." His discussion of Koncheyev's book boiled down to his answering for the author a kind of implied album questionnaire (Your favorite flower? Favorite hero? Which virtue do you prize most?): "The poet," Linyov wrote of Koncheyev, "likes [there followed a string of quotations, for-

cibly distorted by their combination and the demands of the accusative case]. He dreads [more bleeding stumps of verse] He finds solace in—[*même jeu*]; but on the other hand [three-quarters of a line turned by means of quotes into a flat statement], at times it seems to him that"—and here Linyov inadvertently extricated something more or less whole:

Days of ripening vines! In the avenues, blue-shaded statues
The fair heavens that lean on the motherland's shoulders
of snow.

—and it was as if the voice of a violin had suddenly drowned the hum of a patriarchal cretin.

On another table, a little farther, Soviet editions were laid out, and one could bend over the morass of Moscow magazines, over a hell of boredom, and even try to make out the agonizing constriction of capitalized abbreviations, carried like doomed cattle all over Russia and horribly recalling the lettering on freight cars (the banging of their buffers, the clanking, the hunchbacked greaser with a lantern, the piercing melancholy of godforsaken stations, the shudder of Russian rails, infinitely long-distance trains) Between *The Star* and *The Red Lamp* (trembling in railway smoke) lay an edition of the Soviet chess magazine *8 × 8*. As Fyodor leafed through it, rejoicing over the human language of the problem diagrams, he noticed a small article with the picture of a thin-bearded old man, glowering over his spectacles; the article was headed "Chernyshevski and Chess." He thought that this might amuse Alexander Yakovlevich and partly for this reason and partly because in general he liked chess problems he took the magazine. the girl, tearing herself away from Kellerman, "couldn't say" how much it cost, but knowing that Fyodor was anyway in debt to the shop she indifferently let him go He went away with the pleasant feeling that he would have some fun at home Being not only an excellent solver of problems but also being gifted to the highest degree with the ability to compose them, he

found therein not only a rest from his literary labors but certain mysterious lessons. As a writer he derived something from the very sterility of these exercises.

A chess composer does not necessarily have to play well. Fyodor was a very indifferent player and played unwillingly. He was fatigued and infuriated by the disharmony between the lack of stamina of his chess thought in the process of the contest and that exclamation-mark-rating brilliance for which it strove For him the construction of a problem differed from playing in about the same way as a verified sonnet does from the polemics of publicists. The making of such a problem began far from the board (as the making of verse began far from paper) with the body in a horizontal position on the sofa (i.e., when the body becomes a distant, dark blue line: its own horizon) when suddenly, from an inner impulse which was indistinguishable from poetic inspiration, he envisioned a bizarre method of embodying this or that refined idea for a problem (say, the combination of two themes, the Indian and the Bristol—or something completely new). For some time he delighted with closed eyes in the abstract purity of a plan realized only in his mind's eye; then he hastily opened his Morocco board and the box of weighty pieces, set them out roughly, on the run, and it immediately became clear that the idea so purely embodied in his brain would demand, here on the board—in order to free it of its thick, carved shell—inconceivable labors, a maximum of mental strain, endless trials and worries, and most of all—that consistent resourcefulness out of which, in the chess sense, truth is constructed. Pondering the alternatives, thus and thus excluding cumbrous constructions, the blots and blanks of support pawns, struggling with duals, he achieved the utmost accuracy of expression, the utmost economy of harmonious forces. If he had not been certain (as he also was in the case of literary creation) that the realization of the scheme already existed in some other world, from which he transferred it into this one, then the complex and prolonged work on the board would have been an intolera-

ble burden to the mind, since it would have to concede, together with the possibility of realization, the possibility of its impossibility. Little by little the pieces and squares began to come to life and exchange impressions. The crude might of the queen was transformed into refined power, restrained and directed by a system of sparkling levers; the pawns grew cleverer; the knights stepped forth with a Spanish caracole. Everything had acquired sense and at the same time everything was concealed. Every creator is a plotter, and all the pieces impersonating his ideas on the board were here as conspirators and sorcerers. Only in the final instant was their secret spectacularly exposed

One or two more refining touches, one more verification —and the problem was ready. The key to it, White's first move, was masked by its apparent absurdity—but it was precisely by the distance between this and the dazzling denouement that one of the problem's chief merits was measured; and in the way that one piece, as if greased with oil, went smoothly behind another after slipping across the whole field and creeping up under its arm, constituted an almost physical pleasure, the titillating sensation of an ideal fit. Now on the board there shone, like a constellation, a ravishing work of art, a planetarium of thought Everything here cheered the chess player's eye: the wit of the threats and defenses, the grace of their interlocked movement, the purity of the mates (so many bullets for exactly so many hearts); every polished piece seemed to be made especially for its square; but perhaps the most fascinating of all was the fine fabric of deceit, the abundance of insidious tries (the refutation of which had its own accessory beauty), and of false trails carefully prepared for the reader.

The third lesson that Friday was with Vasiliev. The editor of the Berlin émigré daily had established relations with an obscure English periodical and now contributed a weekly article to it on the situation in Soviet Russia Having a smattering of the language, he wrote his article out in rough, with gaps and Russian phrases interspersed, and demanded from Fyodor a literal translation of the usual

phrases found in leaders: you're only young once, wonders never cease, this is a lion and not a dog (Krílov), troubles never come singly, Peter's been paid without robbing Paul, jack of all trades, master of none, you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, necessity is the mother of invention, it's only a lover's tiff, hark at the pot calling the kettle black, birds of a feather flock together, the poor man always gets the blame, it's no use crying over spilt milk, we need Reform, not reforms. And very often there occurred the expression "it produced the impression of an exploding bomb." Fyodor's task consisted in dictating from Vasiliev's rough copy Vasiliev's article in its corrected form direct into the typewriter—this seemed extraordinarily practical to Vasiliev, but actually the dictation was monstrously dragged out as a result of the agonizing pauses. But oddly enough, the method of using old saws and fables turned out to be a condensed way of conveying something of the *"moralités"* characteristic of all conscious manifestations of the Soviet authorities: reading through the finished article which had seemed rubbish as he dictated it, Fyodor detected under the clumsy translation and the author's journalistic effects the movement of a logical and forceful idea, which progressed steadily toward its goal—and calmly produced a mate in the corner.

Accompanying him afterwards to the door, Vasiliev with a sudden fierce knitting of his bristly brows said quickly:

"Well, did you see what they have done to Koncheyev? I can imagine how it affected him, what a blow, what a flop."

"He couldn't care less, I know that," replied Fyodor, and an expression of momentary disappointment appeared on Vasiliev's face.

"Oh, he's just putting it on," he retorted resourcefully, cheering up again. "In reality he's sure to be stunned."

"I don't think so," said Fyodor.

"In any case I'm sincerely grieved for him," ended Vasiliev, with the look of one who had no wish at all to part with his grief.

Somewhat weary but glad of the fact that his working day was over, Fyodor Konstantinovich boarded a tram and opened his magazine (again that glimpse of Chernyshevski's inclined face—all I know about him is that he was "a syringe of sulphuric acid," as Rozanov, I think, says somewhere, and that he wrote the novel *What to Do?*, which blends in my mind with another social writer's *Whose Fault?*). He became absorbed in an examination of the problems and soon satisfied himself that if it had not been for two end-games of genius by an old Russian master plus several interesting reprints from foreign publications, this *8 × 8* would not have been worth buying The conscientious student exercises of the young Soviet composers were not so much "problems" as "tasks": cumbrously they treated of this or that mechanical theme (some kind of "pinning" and "unpinning") without a hint of poetry; these were chess comic strips, nothing more, and the shoving and jostling pieces did their clumsy work with proletarian seriousness, reconciling themselves to the presence of double solutions in the flat variants and to the agglomeration of police pawns

Having missed his stop he still managed to jump off at the public garden, turning at once on his heels as a man usually does after abruptly leaving a tram, and went by the church along Agamemnonstrasse It was early evening, the sky was cloudless and the motionless and quiet sunshine endowed every object with a peaceful, lyrical air of festivity. A bicycle, leaned against a yellow-lit wall, was slightly bent outwards, like one of the side horses of a troika, but even more perfect in shape was its transparent shadow on the wall. An elderly, stoutish gentleman, waggling his ear, was hurrying to tennis, wearing a fancy shirt and city trousers and carrying three gray balls in a net, and beside him walking swiftly on rubber soles was a German girl of the sporting sort, with an orange face and golden hair Behind the brightly painted pumps a radio was singing in a gas station, while above its pavilion vertical yellow letters stood against the light blue of the sky—the name of a car

firm—and on the second letter, on the *"E"* (a pity that it was not on the first, on the *"B"*—would have made an alphabetic vignette) sat a live blackbird, with a yellow—for economy's sake—beak, singing louder than the radio. The house in which Fyodor lived was a corner one and stuck out like a huge red ship, carrying a complex and glassy turreted structure on its bow, as if a dull, sedate architect had suddenly gone mad and made a sally into the sky. On all the little balconies which girdled the house in tier after tier there was something green blossoming, and only the Shchyogolevs' was untidily empty, with an orphaned pot on the parapet and a corpse hung out in moth-eaten furs to air.

Right at the very beginning of his stay in this flat Fyodor, supposing that he would need complete peace in the evenings, had reserved himself the right to have supper in his room. On the table among his books there now awaited him two gray sandwiches with a glossy mosaic of sausage, a cup of stale tea and a plate of pink kissel (from the morning). Chewing and sipping, he again opened *8 × 8* (he was again glared at by a butting N. G. Ch.) and began to enjoy quietly a study in which the few white pieces seemed to be hanging over an abyss and yet won the day. Then he found a charming four-mover by an American master, the beauty of which consisted not only of the cleverly hidden mating device but also of the fact that in reply to a tempting but incorrect attack, Black, by drawing in and blocking his own pieces, managed to construct just in time a hermetic stalemate. Then in one of the Soviet productions (P. Mitrofanov, Tver) a beautiful example turned up of how to come a cropper: Black had NINE pawns—the ninth having evidently been added at the last minute, in order to cure a cook, as if a writer had hastily changed "he will surely be told" in the proofs to the more correct "he will doubtless be told" without noticing that this was immediately followed by: "of her doubtful reputation."

Suddenly he felt a bitter pang—why had everything in Russia become so shoddy, so crabbed and gray, how could she have been so befooled and befuddled? Or had the old

urge "toward the light" concealed a fatal flaw, which in the course of progress toward the objective had grown more and more evident, until it was revealed that this "light" was burning in the window of a prison overseer, and that was all? When had this strange dependence sprung up between the sharpening of thirst and the muddying of the source? In the forties? in the sixties? and "what to do" now? Ought one not to reject any longing for one's homeland, for any homeland besides that which is with me, within me, which is stuck like the silver sand of the sea to the skin of my soles, lives in my eyes, my blood, gives depth and distance to the background of life's every hope? Some day, interrupting my writing, I will look through the window and see a Russian autumn.

Some friends of the Shchyogolevs, gone to Denmark for the summer, had recently left Boris Ivanovich a radio. One could hear him diddling with it, strangling squeakers and creakers, moving ghostly furniture. An odd pastime!

The room meanwhile had grown dark; above the blackened outlines of the houses beyond the yard, where the windows were already alight, the sky had an ultramarine shade and in the black wires between black chimneys there shone a star—which, like any star, could only properly be seen by switching one's vision, so that all the rest moved away out of focus. He propped his cheek on his fist and sat there at the table, looking through the window. In the distance a large clock (whose position he was always promising himself to define, but always forgot, the more so since it was never audible under the layer of daytime sounds) slowly chimed nine o'clock. It was time to go and meet Zina.

They usually met on the other side of the railway bridge, on a quiet street in the vicinity of Grunewald, where the massifs of the houses (dark crossword puzzles, in which not everything was yet filled in by yellow light) were interrupted by waste plots, kitchen gardens and coal-houses ("the ciphers and sighs of the darkness"—a line of Koncheyev's), where there was, by the way, a remarkable fence

made out of another one which had been dismantled somewhere else (perhaps in another town) and which had previously surrounded the camp of a wandering circus, but the boards had now been placed in senseless order, as if nailed together by a blind man, so that the circus beasts once painted on them, and reshuffled during transit, had disintegrated into their component parts—here there was the leg of a zebra, there a tiger's back, and some animal's haunch appeared next to another creature's reversed paw: life's promise of a life to come had been kept with respect to the fence, but the rupture of the earthly images on it destroyed the earthly value of immortality; at night, however, little could be made out of it, while the exaggerated shadows of the leaves (nearby there was a streetlight) lay on the boards quite logically, in perfect order—this served as a kind of compensation, the more so since it was impossible to transfer them to another place, with the boards, having broken up and mixed the pattern: they could only be transferred *in toto,* together with the whole night.

Waiting for her arrival She was always late—and always came by another road than he Thus it transpired that even Berlin could be mysterious. Within the linden's bloom the streetlight winks. A dark and honeyed hush envelops us. Across the curb one's passing shadow slinks: across a stump a sable ripples thus. The night sky melts to peach beyond that gate. There water gleams, there Venice vaguely shows. Look at that street—it runs to China straight, and yonder star above the Volga glows! Oh, swear to me to put in dreams your trust, and to believe in fantasy alone, and never let your soul in prison rust, nor stretch your arm and say a wall of stone.

She always unexpectedly appeared out of the darkness, like a shadow leaving its kindred element. At first her ankles would catch the light she moved them close together as if she walked along a slender rope. Her summer dress was short, of night's own color, the color of the streetlights and the shadows, of tree trunks and of shining pavement—paler than her bare arms and darker than her

face. This kind of blank verse Blok dedicated to Georgi Chulkov. Fyodor kissed her on her soft lips, she leaned her head for a moment on his collarbone and then, quickly freeing herself, walked beside him, at first with such sorrow on her face as if during their twenty hours of separation an unheard-of disaster had taken place, but then little by little she came to herself and now smiled—smiled as she never did during the day. What was it about her that fascinated him most of all? Her perfect understanding, the absolute pitch of her instinct for everything that he himself loved? In talking to her one could get along without any bridges, and he would barely have time to notice some amusing feature of the night before she would point it out. And not only was Zina cleverly and elegantly made to measure for him by a very painstaking fate, but both of them, forming a single shadow, were made to the measure of something not quite comprehensible, but wonderful and benevolent and continuously surrounding them.

When he had first moved in with the Shchyogolevs and seen her for the first time he had had the feeling that he already knew a great deal about her, that even her name had been long familiar to him, and certain characteristics of her life, but until he spoke to her he was unable to make out whence and how he knew it. At first he saw her only at dinner and he watched her carefully, studying her every movement. She hardly spoke to him, although by certain signs—not so much by the pupils of her eyes as by their luster that seemed slanted at him—he felt that she was noticing every glance of his and that all her movements were restricted by the lightest shrouds of that very impression she was producing on him; and because it seemed completely impossible to him that he should have any part in her life, he suffered when he detected something particularly enchanting in her and was glad and relieved when he glimpsed some flaw in her beauty. Her pale hair which radiantly and imperceptibly merged into the sunny air around her head, the light blue vein on her temple, another on her long, tender neck, her delicate hand, her sharp

elbow, the narrowness of her hips, the weakness of her shoulders and the peculiar forward slant of her graceful body, as if the floor over which, gathering speed like a skater, she hastened, was always gently sloping away toward the haven of the chair or table on which lay the object she sought—all this was perceived by him with agonizing distinctness and then, during the day, was repeated an infinity of times in his memory, returning ever more lazily, pallidly and jerkily, losing life and dwindling as a result of the automatic repetitions of the disintegrating image to a mere sketch broken and blurred, in which nothing of the original life subsisted; but as soon as he saw her again, all this subconscious work directed at the destruction of her image, whose power he feared more and more, went by the board, and beauty again flared forth—her nearness, her frightening accessibility to his gaze, the reconstituted union of all the details. If, during those days, he had had to answer before some pretersensuous court (remember how Goethe said, pointing with his cane at the starry sky. "There is my conscience!") he would scarcely have decided to say that he loved her—for he had long since realized that he was incapable of giving his entire soul to anyone or anything: its working capital was too necessary to him for his own private affairs; but on the other hand, when he looked at her he immediately reached (in order to fall off again a minute later) such heights of tenderness, passion and pity as are reached by few loves. And at night, especially after long periods of mental work, half coming out of sleep not by the way of reason as it were, but through the back door of delirium, with a mad, long-drawn-out rapture, he felt her presence in the room on a camp-bed hastily and carelessly prepared by a property man, two paces away from him, but while he nursed his excitement and reveled in the temptation, in the shortness of the distance, in the heavenly possibilities, which, incidentally, had nothing of the flesh (or rather, had some blissful replacement for the flesh, expressed in semi-dreamlike terms), he was enticed back into the oblivion of sleep whence he hopelessly re-

treated, thinking he still continued to hold his prize. Actually she never appeared in his dreams, remaining content to delegate various representatives of hers and confidantes, who bore no resemblance to her but who produced sensations that made a fool of him—to which the bluish dawn was a witness.

And then, waking completely to the sounds of the morning, he immediately landed in the very thick of the happiness sucking at his heart, and it was good to be alive, and there glimmered in the mist some exquisite event which was just about to happen. But on trying to imagine Zina all he saw was a faint sketch which her voice behind the wall was incapable of igniting with life. And an hour or two later he met her at table and everything was renewed, and he again understood that without her there would not be any morning mist of happiness.

One evening, a fortnight after he had moved in, she knocked on his door and with a haughtily resolute step, and an almost contemptuous expression on her face, entered, holding in her hand a small volume hidden in a pink cover. "I have a request," she said briskly and curtly. "Will you sign this for me?" Fyodor took the book—and recognized in it a pleasantly worn, pleasantly softened up by two years of use (this was something quite new to him) copy of his collection of poems. He began very slowly to unstopper his bottle of ink—although at other times, when he wanted to write, the cork would pop out as that in a bottle of champagne; meanwhile, Zina, watching his fingers fumbling the cork, added hastily: "Only your name, please, only your name." F. Godunov-Cherdyntsev signed his name and was about to put the date, but thought better of it, fearing she might detect in this some vulgar emphasis. "That's fine, thank you," she said and went out, blowing on the page.

The next day but one was Sunday, and around four it suddenly became clear that she was alone at home; he was reading in his room; she was in the dining room and kept making short expeditions from time to time into her own room across the hall, whistling as she went, and in her light

crisp footfalls there was a topographical enigma since a door from the dining room led straight into her room. But we are reading and we will keep on reading "Longer, longer, and for as long as possible, shall I be in a strange country And although my thoughts, my name, my works will belong to Russia, I myself, my mortal organism, will be removed from it" (and at the same time, on his walks in Switzerland, the man who could write *thus,* used to strike dead with his cane the lizards running across his path—"the devil's brood"—as he said with the squeamishness of a Ukrainian and the hatred of a fanatic). An unimaginable return! The régime; what do I care! Under a monarchy—flags and drums, under a republic—flags and elections . . . Again she went by No, reading was out—too excited, too full of the feeling that another in his place would have sauntered out and addressed her with casual savoir-faire; but when he imagined himself sailing out and butting into the dining room and not knowing what to say, he began to wish that she would soon go out or that the Shchyogolevs would come home And at the very moment when he decided to stop listening and give his undivided attention to Gogol, Fyodor quickly got up and went into the dining room.

She was sitting by the door to the balcony and with her gleaming lips half parted was aiming a thread at a needle Through the open door one could see the little sterile balcony and hear the tinny ringing and clicking of leaping raindrops—it was a heavy, warm, April shower

"Sorry, I didn't know you were here," said mendacious Fyodor "I only wanted to say something about that book of mine it's not the real thing, the poems are bad, I mean, they're not all bad, but generally speaking Those I've been publishing these last two years in the *Gazeta* are much better."

"I liked very much the one you recited at that evening of poetry," she said. "The one about the swallow that cried out."

"Oh, were you there? Yes. But I have even better ones, I assure you."

She suddenly jumped up from her chair, threw her darning on the seat, and with her arms dangling, leaned forward, taking quick small gliding steps, she sped into her room and returned with some newspaper clippings—his and Koncheyev's poems.

"But I don't think I have everything here," she remarked.

"I didn't know that such things happened," said Fyodor and added awkwardly. "Now I'll ask them to make little holes around them with a perforator—you know, like coupons, so that you can tear them out more easily."

She continued to busy herself with a stocking stretched over a wooden mushroom and without lifting her eyes, but smiling quickly and slyly, she said:

"I also know that you used to live at seven Tannenberg Street, I often went there "

"You did?" said Fyodor, amazed.

"I used to know Lorentz's wife in St Petersburg—she gave me drawing lessons."

"How queer," said Fyodor.

"Romanov is now in Munich," she continued. "A most objectionable character, but I always liked his things."

They talked about Romanov and about his pictures. He had reached full maturity. Museums were buying his stuff. Having passed through everything, loaded with rich experience, he had returned to an expressive harmony of line. You know his "Footballer"? There's a reproduction in this magazine, here it is. The pale, sweaty, tensely distorted face of a player depicted from top to toe preparing at full speed to shoot with terrible force at the goal. Tousled red hair, a burst of mud on his temple, the taut muscles of his bare neck. A wrinkled, soaking wet, violet singlet, clinging in spots to his body, comes down low over his spattered shorts, and is crossed with the wonderful diagonal of a mighty crease. He is in the act of hooking the ball sideways;

one raised hand with wide-splayed fingers is a participant in the general tension and surge. But most important, of course, are the legs: a glistening white thigh, an enormous scarred knee, boots swollen with dark mud, thick and shapeless, but nevertheless marked by an extraordinarily precise and powerful grace. The stocking has slipped down one vigorously twisted calf, one foot is buried in rich mud, the other is about to kick—and how!—the hideous, tar-black ball—and all this against a dark gray background saturated with rain and snow Looking at this picture one could *already* hear the whiz of the leather missile, *already* see the goalkeeper's desperate dive.

"And I know something else," said Zina "You were supposed to help me with a translation, Charski told you about it, but for some reason you didn't turn up."

"How queer," repeated Fyodor.

There was a bang in the hall—that was Marianna Nikolavna returning—and Zina deliberately got up, gathered the cuttings together and went to her room—only later did Fyodor understand why she considered it necessary to act that way, but at the moment it seeme to him like discourtesy—and when Mrs. Shchyogolev came into the dining room the result was as if he had been stealing sugar out of the sideboard

One evening a few days later he overheard an angry conversation from his room—the gist of which was that guests were due to arrive and that it was time for Zina to go downstairs with the key. He heard her go, and after a brief inner struggle, he thought himself up a walk—say to the slot machine by the public garden for a postage stamp. To complete the illusion, he put on a hat, although he practically never wore one. The minute light went out while he was on his way down but immediately there was a click and it went on again: that was she downstairs who had pressed the button He found her standing by the glass door, playing with the key looped on her finger, the whole of her brightly illuminated, everything glistened—the turquoise

knit of her jumper, her fingernails and the even little hairs on her forearm.

"It's unlocked," she said, but he stopped, and both of them began to look through the glass at the dark, mobile night, at the gas lamp, at the shadow of the railings.

"It doesn't look as if they're coming," she muttered, softly clinking the keys

"Have you been waiting long?" he asked "If you like I'll take a turn," and at that moment the light went out "If you like I'll stay here all night," he added in the darkness.

She laughed, and then sighed abruptly, as if fed up with waiting. Through the glass the ashen light from the street fell on both of them and the shadow of the iron design on the door undulated over her and continued obliquely over him, like a shoulder-belt, while a prismatic rainbow lay on the wall. And, as often happened with him—though it was deeper this time than ever before—Fyodor suddenly felt—in this glassy darkness—the strangeness of life, the strangeness of its magic, as if a corner of it had been turned back for an instant and he had glimpsed its unusual lining Close to his face there was her soft cinereous cheek cut across by a shadow, and when Zina suddenly, with mysterious bewilderment and a mercurial sparkle in her eyes, turned toward him and the shadow lay across her lips, oddly changing her, he took advantage of the absolute freedom in this world of shadows to take her by her ghostly elbows; but she slipped out of the pattern and with a quick jab of her finger restored the light.

"Why?" he asked.

"I'll explain it some other time," replied Zina, not taking her eyes off him.

"Tomorrow," said Fyodor.

"All right, tomorrow. Only I want to warn you that there is not going to be any conversation between you and me at home That's final and for good."

"Then let's . . ." he began, but at this point stocky Colonel Kasatkin and his tall, faded wife loomed on the other side of the door.